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The author of eleven novels, including *Death in the Andes* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) **MARIO VARGAS LLOSA** is a recipient of both the Cervantes and the Jerusalem Prize. . . . **ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE** teaches at Emory University. Her latest book, *"Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life": How Today's Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch with the Real Concerns of Women* was published by Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. . . . A leading literary theorist and cultural critic, **TSVETAN TODOROV** is also the author of several books, including *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (Henry Holt). . . . **JIM TUCKER** has translated the work of George Konrad, and others, for magazines including *Dissent* and *Harper's*. . . . **VLADIMIR TISMANEANU** is Professor of Politics at the University of Maryland (College Park). His essay is an abridged chapter from his forthcoming book, *Fantasies of Salvation: Politics, Myth and Ideology After Communism* (Princeton University Press). . . . **JON SURGAL** is a fiction writer living in New York City. . . . **ROBERT GIROUX**, a partner of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, is presently writing his memoirs. . . . Professor Emeritus of English at Boston University, **MILLICENT BELL** is the author of numerous books. She recently edited *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (Cambridge University Press). . . . *Dictionnaire historique de la vie politique française au XX^e siècle* by **JEAN-FRANÇOIS SIRINELLI** is available from PUF. . . . **FREDERICK FEIRSTEIN** is a psychoanalyst practicing in New York City. His *New and Selected Poems* is forthcoming from Story Line Press. . . . **SHARONA BEN-TOV** is the director of the Program in Creative Writing at Bowling Green State University and the author of *During Ceasefire* (Harper & Row) and *The Artificial Paradise* (University of Michigan). . . . A regular contributor to *Partisan Review*, **KAREN WILKIN** is a critic and curator whose most recent book, *Cézanne*, was published by Abbeville Press. . . . **DANIEL BOSCH** teaches expository writing and poetry writing at Harvard Unversity and Harvard Extension School. . . . **PETER FILKINS**'s forthcoming collection of poems, *What She Knew,* will be published by Orchises Press. He teaches at Simon's Rock College of Bard. . . . Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Johns Hopkins University, **ALLEN GROSSMAN** is the author, most recently, of *The Long Schoolroom: Essays in the Bitter Logic of the Poetic Principle* (University of Michigan Press). . . . Nobel Laureate **EUGENIO MONTALE**, who died in 1981, was a renowned poet, translator, and prose writer. . . . An acclaimed classicist, translator, and critic, **WILLIAM ARROWSMITH** won the American Academy of Poets' 1986 Harold Morton Landon Award for Translation for his translation of *The Storm and Other Things* by Eugenio Montale. He died in 1992. . . . **PETER SACKS** is Professor of English at Harvard Unversity. His most recent collection of poems, *Natal Command*, was published by the

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University of Chicago Press. . . . Penguin USA will bring out *Vain Empires*, **WILLIAM LOGAN**'s next book of poems, in the spring of 1998. . . . The author of numerous books, **LYUBOMIR LEVCHEV** is also the chief editor of *Orpheus* magazine. . . . **CHTILIANA HALATCHEVA-ROUSSEVA** translated Levchev's collection of poems, "Sky Break". . . . Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cluj, **MARTA PETREU** is editor of the prominent Romanian cultural monthly *Apostrof*. . . . *The Sky Behind the Forest* (Bloodaxe Books), **ADAM SORKIN**'s most recent book, was selected by the British Poetry Book Society as a recommended translation. . . . **LIVIU BLEOCA** is a writer, translator and diplomat in the Romanian foreign service. . . . **JENNIFER MICHAEL HECHT** teaches History at Nassau Community College in New York and has feature articles forthcoming in *French History Studies* and *The Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*. . . . **LAURENCE LIEBERMAN**'s newest collection of poems, *Compass of the Dying*, will be published by University of Arkansas Press next spring. . . . **EUGENE GOODHEART** is Edytha Macy Gross Professor of Humanities at Brandeis University and the author of numerous books, most recently *Desire and Its Discontents* (Columbia University Press) and *The Reign of Ideology* (Columbia University Press). . . . Schweitzer Professor Emeritus at New York University, **AILEEN WARD** has published biographical studies and reviews of Blake in the *T.L.S.*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Tri-Quarterly*, *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* as well as in other publications. . . . **SANFORD PINSKER** is Shadek Professor of Humanities at Franklin and Marshall College and editor of *Academic Questions*; his book *Worrying about Race* is available from Whitson Publishers. . . . **JOHN PECK**'s sixth book of poetry, *M and Other Poems*, was published last year by Northwestern University Press. He is a Jungian analyst who lives and works in Vermont.

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# COMMENTS

There were two excellent pieces in the September 1996 issue of *Commentary*, one on education, the other on national defense.

The article on education by Chester E. Finn, Jr. ("Can the Schools Be Saved?") was the only one I've seen that points to the real reason for the dismal state of education in our country. Finn does not emphasize it throughout his piece, but in his last paragraph he states quite clearly that it is not the structure of education that is at fault, but the culture that lies behind it. As Finn indicates, many gadgeteering reforms have been advanced by politicians and educators, but while they may do some good, they do not go to the heart of the problem. It is the general culture, which has been invaded by the trendy currents originating in the academy and spreading to the media. As a result, the climate of education is antithetical to genuine education. And the students are not geared to the process of learning that underlies the traditional idea of education.

Such reformist suggestions as vouchers, privatization, improvement of teachers, and the pouring in of more money undoubtedly would improve the situation but would not remedy the basic disease.

The various trendy causes of deconstruction, radical feminism, gay liberation, gender theory, sex education, and the negation of the very idea of intellectual traditions in Western civilization—all these make for an atmosphere not conducive to the proper learning of history, literature, science, and mathematics.

There are really two separate problems: the problem of higher education and the problem of the elementary and secondary schools. Many of the latter are to a large extent prisons without walls and without guards. There are some good lower schools, but the bad ones lower the statistical averages.

There is also the problem, largely not mentioned by politicians or educators, of mass education. Perhaps not all of the population is cut out for high-level, general academic education. Perhaps the solution, which we are loathe to acknowledge, is some kind of vocational training, in addition to the three Rs, for some part of our younger generations.

The atmosphere of higher education not only affects that of the primary and secondary schools, but in itself, also, as has been pointed out, is antithetical to what used to be known as higher education.

If the study of the past, of our intellectual heritage, is to be regarded as elitist and imperialist, then obviously there is a question as to what a genuine education is to consist of beyond the trendy causes so popular in the academy and the media.

The article on national defense, ("Defenseless America," Angelo M. Codevilla) makes clear that the threats to America consist largely from the

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proliferation of nuclear weapons and missiles in the so-called third world, and the author points out that our development of anti-nuclear systems has been sadly lagging, particularly in this administration. The trendy anti-Americanism, particularly in the academy, and extending to many scientists, has been highly critical of the Strategic Defense Initiative, and has succeeded in cutting down the appropriations for them. It is a frightening picture.

In both cases, that of education and that of national defense, it is the culture that is responsible.

Norman Podhoretz had an interesting piece on pornography, art, and censorship in the April issue of *Commentary* ("'Lolita,' My Mother-in-Law, the Marquis de Sade, and Larry Flynt"). One could disagree with some of his views, such as the idea that the Modernists did not care about the so-called general reader. Actually there are many kinds of readers, and it is probably true that most Modernists were mainly interested in the upper level of readers. For example, when E.M. Forster was asked for whom he wrote—a typical question of interviewers—he replied that he wrote for people like himself. But Podhoretz did not give simple answers to complex questions. And I was struck by his remark that he'd become more conservative as he got older—which seems also to be true of me. When we were younger, we were both ready to accept pornography and "pornographic art"—like everyone else. And we were against censorship in any form, although we were not much interested in the First Amendment.

Roger Shattuck was concerned with the problem of pornographic writing in his splendid book, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography*, though he associated the problem of censorship with other forms of knowledge that are or should be forbidden. He thought for example that some of de Sade's works should not be available—and he cited some instances where they induced criminal behavior. But it is not clear how widespread is this effect. Nor, to further complicate the problem, do we know how much criminal behavior is produced by people who have not read material of this kind.

We also face the problem that many, if not most, people have these thoughts whether or not they have read them or seen them in paintings. And it is not considered good taste to express them publicly. In fact good taste is a form of censorship. Moreover, civilization itself, as Freud and others remarked, is an enforcement of censorship in the interest of society as a whole.

To Podhoretz's credit, he doesn't come to clear-cut conclusions nor does he come out firmly for any kind of censorship. But he does say that he wished that Nabokov had not written *Lolita*.

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The usual approach to the problem has been to distinguish pornography from literature and art. But what can we say to people, even to people like Shattuck, who admit that de Sade's pornographic writing is art, and how and by whom is the distinction to be made? I, for one, am ready to say that much of de Sade is not art. Nor is Mapplethorpe art. The line between them is sometimes very thin. Still, the fact is that a good deal of Indian erotic drawing has to be conceded to be art.

Ultimately, we run up against a common belief that in a free society everything that is not criminal or harmful to other people should be permitted. Perhaps one solution, which I think Shattuck tends to accept, is that everything should be permitted but should not be easily available. Or is this a form of hedging?

The problem of pornography has to do with morality in general. But it is doubtful that morality can be legislated. Perhaps it can be advanced only through the family, the community, and religion.

**W.P.**

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**MARIO VARGAS LLOSA**

# The Truth of Lies

1

Ever since I wrote my first story, people have asked me if what I write is "true." Although my replies sometimes satisfy the questioners, every time that I answer that particular enquiry, however sincerely, I am left with the uncomfortable feeling of having said something that never gets to the heart of the matter.

The question as to whether novels are true or false matters as much to certain people as whether they are good or bad and many readers judge the latter by the former. The Spanish inquisitors, for example, banned the publication and importation of novels in the Spanish American colonies with the argument that these absurd and nonsensical—that is, lying—works could be bad for the spiritual health of the Indians. For that reason, the Spanish Americans only read contraband fiction for three hundred years and the first novel to be published under that name in Spanish America appeared only after Independence (in Mexico in 1816). By banning not particular works, but a literary genre in the abstract, the Inquisition established something that, in its eyes, was a law without exceptions: that novels always lie, that they all offer a false vision of the world. Years ago, I wrote a study ridiculing these dogmatic men who were capable of making such a generalization. Now I think that the Spanish inquisitors were perhaps the first people to understand—before the critics and the novelists themselves—the nature of fiction and its seditious tendencies.

In effect, novels lie—they can do nothing else—but that is only part of the story. The other part is that, by lying, they express a curious truth that can only be expressed in a furtive and veiled fashion, disguised as something that it is not. Put this way, it seems something of a rigmarole, but, in fact, it is really very simple. Men are not content with their lot and almost all of them—rich and poor, brilliant and ordinary, famous and unknown—would like a life different from the one that they are leading. Novels were born to

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placate this hunger, albeit in a distorted way. They are written and read so that human beings may have the lives that they are not prepared to do without. Within each novel, there stirs a rebellion, there beats a desire.

Does this mean that the novel is synonymous with unreality? That the introspective buccaneers of Conrad, the languid Proustian aristocrats, the anonymous little men punished by adversity of Franz Kafka and the erudite metaphysicians of Borges's stories excite us or move us because they have nothing to do with us, because it is impossible for us to identify our experiences with theirs? Of course not. One must tread carefully because this road—of truth and lies in the world of fiction—is strewn with traps, and the inviting oases that appear on the horizon are usually mirages.

What does it mean that a novel *always lies*? Not what the officials and cadets thought at the Leoncio Prado Military School, where my first novel, *The Time of the Hero*, takes place—supposedly at least—when they burned the book for being slanderous to their institution. Or what my first wife thought when she read another of my novels, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*. Feeling that she had been wrongly portrayed in it, she published a book seeking to restore the truth altered by the fiction. Of course, in both stories there are more inventions, distortions and exaggerations than memories and, when I wrote them, I never intended to be anecdotally faithful to events and people that preceded or were outside the novel. In both cases, as in everything that I have written, I started out from some experiences that were still vivid in my memory and stimulated my imagination, and I imagined something that reflects these working materials in a very unfaithful way. One does not write novels to recount life, but rather to transform it, by adding something. In the slim novels by the Frenchman Restif de la Bretonne, reality could not be more photographic; they are a catalogue of French eighteenth-century customs. In these laborious costumbrist sketches, in which everything approximates to real life, we find, however, something different, minimal but revolutionary. That in this world, men do not fall in love with women because of the purity of their features, the elegance of their bodies, their spiritual virtues and the like, but *exclusively* because of the beauty of their feet (this has been called, for that reason, *bretonisme*, the fetishism of the shoe). In a less crude and explicit, and also in a less conscious way, all novels remake reality—embellishing or making it worse—just as the extravagant Restif did with such delicious ingenuity. In these subtle or gross additions to life—in which the novelist gives form to his secret obsessions—lies the originality of a fiction. This originality is more profound the more it expresses a general need and the more readers there are, through time and space, that can identify in this contraband smuggled into life the obscure demons that disturb them. Could I, in the novels that I mentioned, have tried to be scrupulously exact with my memories? Of course. But even if I had

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achieved the boring feat of only narrating true facts and describing characters whose biographies neatly fit their novels, my novels would not have been, for all this, any less lying and any more true than they are now.

Because it is not the story which in essence decides the truth or lies of a work of fiction, but the fact that this story is written rather than lived, that it is made of words and not concrete experiences. Facts suffer a profound change when they are transformed into words. The real fact—the bloody battle that I took part in, the Gothic silhouette of the young woman that I loved—is one, while the signs that could describe it are innumerable. By choosing some and discounting others, the novelist privileges one and kills off a thousand other possibilities and versions of what he is describing: this, then, is altered: *what is described* becomes *what has been described*. Am I referring only to the case of the realist writer, that sect, school or tradition to which I doubtless belong, whose novels recount events that the readers can recognize as possible through their own lived experience of reality? It would seem in effect that for the writer of fantasy, who describes unrecognizable and blatantly inexistent worlds, that the comparison between reality and fiction does not even arise. It does arise, however, albeit in a different way. The "irreality" of fantastic literature becomes, for the reader, a symbol or an allegory, that is, a representation of realities, of experiences that can be identified in life. What is important is that it is not the "realist" or "fantastic" nature of a story that draws the line between truth and lies in a fiction.

Accompanying this first transformation—that words impose upon deeds—there is another which is no less radical: that of time. Real life flows and does not stop, it is incommensurable, a chaos in which each story mingles with all the other stories and thus it never begins or ends. Fictional life is a simulacrum in which that dizzying disorder becomes order: organization, cause and effect, beginning and end. The sovereignty of a novel is not just derived from the language in which it is written. It is also derived from its temporal system, from the way in which existence flows within it: when it stops, when it accelerates and the chronological perspective from which the narrator describes this invented time. If there is distance between words and deeds, then there is always a chasm between real time and the time of fiction. Novelistic time is an artifice fabricated to achieve certain psychological effects. In it, the past can come after the present—the effect precede the cause—as in that story by Alejo Carpentier, *Viaje a la semilla* (Journey Back to the Source), which begins with the death of an old man and continues up to his gestation in his mother's womb; or it can be just a remote past which never manages to dissolve into the near past from which the narrator is narrating, as occurs in most classic novels; or an eternal present without a past or a future, as in the fictions of Samuel

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Beckett; or a labyrinth in which past, present and future coexist and cancel each other out, as in *The Sound and the Fury* by Faulkner.

Novels have a beginning and an end and even in the most formless and intermittent of them, life takes on a meaning that we can perceive because they give us a perspective that real life, in which we are immersed, always denies us. This order is an invention, an addition by the novelist, a simulator who seems to recreate life whereas in truth he is amending it. Sometimes subtly sometimes brutally, fiction betrays life, encapsulating it in a weft of words which reduces its scale and makes it accessible to the reader. This reader can therefore judge it, understand it, and above all live it, with an impunity that real life does not allow.

What is the difference, then, between fiction and a newspaper article or a history book? Are they not all composed of words? Do they not imprison within the artificial time of the tale that boundless torrent that is real time? My answer is that they are opposing systems for approximating to reality. While the novel rebels and transgresses life, those other genres can only be its slave. The notion of truth or lies functions in a different way in each case. For journalism or history, truth depends on the comparison between what is written and the reality that inspires it. The closer the one is to the other, the more truthful it is; the further away, the more deceitful. To say that *The History of the French Revolution* by Michelet or *The Conquest of Peru* by Prescott are "novelistic" is to scoff at them, to insinuate that they lack seriousness. On the other hand, to document the historical errors in the depiction of the Napoleonic Wars in *War and Peace* would be a waste of time: the truth of a novel does not depend on that. On what, then? On its own capacity for persuasion, on the communicative force of its fantasy, on the skill of its magic. Every good novel tells the truth and every bad novel lies. Because to "tell the truth" for a novel means making the reader live an illusion and "to lie" means being incapable of achieving this trick. The novel, then, is an amoral genre, or rather it has its own particular ethics in which truth and lies are exclusively aesthetic terms. Brecht's argument that works of art should strive to achieve "critical objectivity" misses the mark: without "illusion" there is no novel.

From what I have said up till now, it would seem that fiction is a gratuitous creation, a casual conjuring trick. Quite the reverse for, however delirious it might seem, its roots draw nutrition from human experience. A recurrent theme in the history of fiction is the risk that is implied in taking novels literally, in believing that life is how novels describe it to be. The romances of chivalry befuddle the brain of Alonso Quijano and propel him along roads where he battles with windmills, and the tragedy of Emma Bovary would not have occurred if Flaubert's character had not tried to be like the heroines of the romantic novels that she reads. Alonso

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Quijano and Emma suffer terrible damage. Do we condemn them for this? No, their stories move us and we admire them: their impossible attempt to *live the fiction* seems to us to personify an idealist attitude which honours the species. Because the human aspiration *par excellence* is to want to be different from what we are. This desire has been the cause of the best and worst moments in history. It has also led to the birth of fiction.

When we read novels, we are not just ourselves but we are also those conjured-up characters into whose midst the novelist transports us. This transportation is a metamorphosis: the asphyxiating enclosure of our real life opens up and we leave it to become others, to live vicariously experiences that novels make our own. A lucid dream, a fantasy incarnate, fiction completes we mutilated beings that have had imposed on us the terrible dichotomy of having only one life and the desires and fantasies to desire one thousand lives. This space between, between our real life and the desires and fantasies that demand that it be richer and more diverse is the terrain of fiction.

In the heart of all these fictions, protest is ablaze. The person who imagined them did so because he could not live them and whoever reads them (and creates them through reading) finds in their phantoms the faces and adventures that he needed to add to his life. This is the truth that the lies of fiction express: the lies that we are, the lies that console us and compensate for our nostalgia and frustrations. What confidence, therefore, can we have in what novels say about the society that produced them? Were those men like that? They were, in the sense that they wanted to be like that, that this was the way that they saw themselves loving, suffering and enjoying pleasure. These lies do not document their lives, but the demons that were stirred up, the dreams in which they found pleasure, which made the life they were leading more bearable. An era is not just peopled with beings of flesh and blood; but also by the ghosts into which these beings change in order to break through the barriers that limit and frustrate them.

The lies of novels are never gratuitous: they compensate for the inadequacies of life. For that reason, when life appears full and absolute and, due to a faith that justifies and absorbs everything, men are content with their lot, novels usually have no function. Religious cultures produce poetry and theatre but only rarely great novels. Fiction is an art of societies where faith is experiencing a certain crisis, *where one needs to believe in something*, where the unitary, trusted and absolute vision has been replaced by a fractured vision and a growing uncertainty about the world in which one lives and the afterlife. In the guts of novels we find not just amorality, then, but also a certain scepticism. When religious culture comes into crisis, life seems to slide away from the structures, dogmas and rules that bound them and revert to chaos; this is the privileged moment for fiction. Its artificial orders

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give refuge and security and also allow the free display of those appetites and fears that real life provoke but cannot satisfy or exorcize. Fiction is a temporary substitute for life. The return to reality is always a brutal impoverishment: the realization that we are less than what we dream. This means that just as fictions temporarily placate human insatisfaction, they also fuel it by stirring up desires and imagination.

The Spanish inquisitors understood the danger. To live lives that one does not live is a source of anxiety, a disagreement with existence that can become a rebellion, an insubordinate attitude towards what is established. It is understandable, then, why regimes that aspire to control life totally mistrust novels and subject them to censorship. To go out of oneself, to be another, in however illusory a fashion, is a way of becoming less of a slave and experiencing the risks of freedom.

2

"Things are not how we see them but how we remember them," wrote Valle Inclán. He was doubtless referring to how things are in literature, an unreality on to which the power of persuasion of a good writer and the credulity of the good reader confer a precarious reality.

For almost every writer, memory is the starting point for fantasy, the springboard that launches the imagination on its unpredictable flight towards fiction. Memories and inventions mix in creative literature in an often inextricable way for the author himself who, although he might pretend the contrary, knows that the recovery of past time to which literature can lead is always a simulacrum, a fiction in which what is remembered dissolves into what is dreamed and vice versa.

For that reason literature is the realm of ambiguity *par excellence*. Its truths are always subjective, half-truths, literary truths which are often flagrant inaccuracies or historical lies. Although the cinematic battle of Waterloo which appears in *Les Misérables* excites us, we know that this was a contest that Victor Hugo fought and won and not one that Napoleon lost. Or, to quote a classic medieval Valencian romance, the conquest of England by the Arabs described in *Tirant lo Blanc* is totally convincing and nobody would dare deny its verisimilitude with the petty argument that in real history an Arab army never crossed the Channel.

The reconstruction of the past in literature is almost always false in terms of historical objectivity. Literary truth is one thing, historical truth another. But although it is full of lies—or rather, because of this fact—literature recounts the history that the history written by the historians would not know how, or be able, to write, because the deceptions, tricks and exaggerations of narrative literature are used to

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express profound and unsettling truths which can only see the light of day in this oblique way.

When Joanot Martorell tells us in *Tirant lo Blanc* that the French prince was so white that one could see wine going down his throat, he is telling us something technically impossible which, however, under the spell of reading, seems to us an undying truth, because in the false reality of the novel, unlike what happens in our own reality excess is never the exception, but always the rule. And nothing is excessive if everything is. In *Tirant*, excess is to be found in the apocalyptic battles with their punctilious rituals and in the deeds of the hero who, alone, defeats multitudes and literally devastates half of Christendom and all of Islam. It is to be found in the comic rituals like those of the pious and libidinous character who kisses women in the mouth three times in honour of the Holy Trinity. And love, in its pages like war, is always excessive and is likely to lead to cataclysmic results. Thus, when Tirant sees for the first time in the darkness of a funeral chamber the insurgent breasts of Princess Carmina, he falls into an almost cataleptic state and stays stretched out on a bed without eating, sleeping or uttering a word for several days. When he finally recovers, it is as if he is learning to speak once again. His first stammered words are "I love."

These lies do not describe what Valencians were like at the end of the fifteenth century, but what they would have liked to have been and done; they do not describe the flesh and blood beings of this terrible time, but their phantoms. Their appetites, their fears, their desires, their resentments are given form. Successful fiction embodies the subjectivity of an epoch and for that reason, although compared to history novels lie, they communicate to us fleeting and evanescent truths which always escape scientific descriptions of reality. Only literature has the techniques and powers to distil this delicate elixir of life: the truth hidden in the heart of human lies. Because in the deceptions of literature, there are no deceptions. At least there should not be any, apart from those naïve people who think that literature should be as objectively faithful to, and dependent on, reality as history is. And there is no deception because when we open a book of fiction, we adjust ourselves to witnessing a representation in which we know very well that our tears or our yawns depend exclusively on the good or bad spell that the narrator casts to make us live his lies as truths and not on his capacity to reproduce lived experience faithfully.

These well-defined boundaries between literature and history—between literary truths and historic truths—are a prerogative of open societies. In these societies, both coexist, independent and sovereign, although complementing each other in their utopian desire to include all of society. And perhaps the greatest demonstration that a society is open, in the meaning that Karl Popper gave to this term, is that fiction and

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history coexist, autonomous and different, without invading or usurping each other's domains and functions.

In closed societies, the reverse is true. And, for that reason, perhaps the best way to define a closed society is by saying that in it fiction and history are no longer different things and have started to become confused and to supplant each other, changing identities as in a masked ball.

In a closed society, power not only takes upon itself the privilege of controlling the actions of men—what they do and what they say—but also aspires to govern their fantasy their dreams and, of course, their memory. In a closed society the past is, sooner or later, subject to manipulation with a view to justifying the present. Official history, the only one tolerated, is the stage for these magical transformations which the *Soviet Encyclopedia* made famous (before *perestroika*): protagonists who appear or disappear without a trace, according to whether they are being resurrected or purged by the powers that be, and the actions of the heroes and villains of the past that, from edition to edition, change their meaning, their valency and their substance as they are accommodated and reaccommodated by the ruling committees of the present. This is a practice that modern totalitarianism has perfected but not invented; its origins are lost in the dawn of civilizations which, until relatively recently were always vertical and despotic.

To organize collective memory to change history into an instrument of government for the purpose of legitimating the ruling powers and providing alibis for their misdeeds, is a temptation inherent in all forms of power. Totalitarian states can make this temptation a reality.

In the past, innumerable civilizations behaved in this way. My ancient compatriots, the Incas, for example. They carried out this policy in a powerful and theatrical way. When the emperor died, there died with him not only his wives and concubines, but also his intellectuals, who were called *amautas*, wise men. Their wisdom was fundamentally applied to the trick of turning fiction into history. The new Inca assumed power with a new court of *amautas* whose mission was to reform official memory, correct the past, modernizing it one might say, in such a way that all the achievements, conquests and buildings that were formally attributed to his forebear, were from that moment transferred to the curriculum vitae of the new emperor. His predecessors were gradually swallowed up by forgetfulness. The Incas knew how to make use of the past, transforming it into literature, so that it could help to immobilize the present, the supreme aspiration of every dictatorship. They banned individual truths, which are always contradictory in favour of an official truth which was coherent and not subject to appeal. (The result is that the Inca empire is a society without history, at least without narrative history, because no one has been able to reconstruct in a reliable way this past that has been so systematically dressed and undressed like a striptease artist.)

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In a closed society, history is imbued with fiction, becomes fiction, because it is invented and reinvented in accordance with contemporary religious or political orthodoxy, or more crudely, according to the whims of the controllers of power.

At the same time, a strict system of censorship is usually set up whereby literature must also fantasize within strict limits, so that its subjective truths do not contradict or cast a shadow over official history but rather serve to disseminate and illustrate it. The difference between historical truth and literary truth disappears and they become fused in a hybrid which bathes history in unreality and empties fiction of mystery, initiative and rebelliousness towards the established order.

To condemn history to lie and literature to propagate the truths manufactured by the powers that be, does not hinder the scientific and technological development of a country or the establishment of certain basic forms of social justice. It has been proved that the Inca system—an extraordinary achievement for its time or for our own—ended hunger and managed to feed all its subjects. And the modern totalitarian states have given a great impetus to education, health, sport and work, putting them within the reach of all, something that open societies, despite their prosperity, have not achieved, because the price of the freedom that they enjoy is often paid for by tremendous inequalities in wealth and what is worse—in opportunities for its members.

But when a state, in its desire to control and decide everything, wrests from human beings the right to invent and believe whatever lies they please, appropriates this right and exercises it through historians and censors—like the Incas through the *amautas*—a great neuralgic center of social life is abolished. And men and women suffer a loss that impoverishes their existence, even when their basic needs are satisfied. Because real life, true life, has never been, nor will ever be, sufficient to fulfil human desires. And because, without this vital dissatisfaction that the lies of fiction both incite and assuage, there is never authentic progress.

The fantasy that we are endowed with is a demonic gift. It is continually opening up a gulf between what we are and what we would like to be, between what we have and what we desire.

But the imagination has conceived of a clever and subtle palliative for this inevitable divorce between our limited reality and our boundless desires: fiction. Thanks to fiction we are more and we are others without ceasing to be the same. In it we can lose ourselves and multiply living many more lives than the ones we have and could live if we were confined to the truth, without escaping from the prison of history. Men do not live by truth alone; they also need lies: those that they invent freely not those that are imposed on them; those that appear as they are, not smuggled in beneath the clothes of history. Fiction enriches their existence, completes

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them and, fleetingly, compensates them for this tragic condition which is our lot: always to desire and dream more than we can actually achieve.

When it freely produces its alternative life, without any other constraint than that of the limitations of its own creator, literature extends human life, adding the dimension that fuels the life deep within us—that impalpable and fleeting, but precious life that we only live through lies.

This is a right that we should defend without shame. Because to play with lies, as the author and reader of fiction do, the lies that they themselves fabricate under the rule of their personal demons, is a way of affirming individual sovereignty and defending it when it is threatened; of preserving one's own free space, a citadel outside the control of power and of the interference of others, where we are truly in charge of our destiny.

Other freedoms are born from this freedom. These private refuges, the subjective truths of literature, bequeath to historical truth, which is complementary to them, a possible existence and a particular function: that of regaining an important part—but only a part—of our memory, that greatness and poverty that we share with others as gregarious beings. This historical truth is indispensable and irreplaceable for us to know what we were and perhaps what we will be as human collectivities. But what we are as individuals and what we wanted to be and could not really be and had therefore to be through fantasy and invention—our secret history—only literature can tell. This is why Balzac wrote that fiction was "the private history of nations."

By itself, literature is a terrible indictment against existence under whatever regime or ideology: a blazing testimony of its insufficiencies, its inability to satisfy us. And, for that reason, it is a permanent corroder of all power structures that would like to see men satisfied and contented. The lies of literature, if they germinate in freedom, prove to us that this was never the case. And these lies are also a permanent conspiracy to prevent this happening in the future.

*Barcelona, June 1989*

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**ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE**

# Rethinking Sexual Harassment

**A** seven-year-old boy bestows an uninvited—or perhaps genuinely unwanted—kiss upon a female classmate and is suspended from school. A twenty-something-year-old college man consents to sex with a college woman, who initiated the encounter, and is suspended from college. What is wrong with this picture? That both verdicts were subsequently modified or reversed offers little comfort to those of us who worry about the abuse of sexual harassment policies and procedures, for, even in the wake of these and other horror stories, the policies and procedures remain on the books and, indeed, may arguably be viewed as complying with the law of the land. Surely each one of us knows at least one sexual harassment story that has received less national attention but caused no less havoc and misery in the lives of those it directly touched.

These days, many—and perhaps most of those in this audience—are coming to suspect that our prevailing sexual harassment policies and laws demand a fresh look. Recent debates over affirmative action even open the possibility that some undetermined number of Americans are prepared to reconsider the entire complex of laws and policies that, since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, has been assembled to protect the rights and opportunities of the disadvantaged. With respect to women specifically, Christina Hoff Sommers, Cathy Young, and Katie Roiphe have forcefully challenged the assumptions of what Christina Sommers calls "gender feminism" and Cathy Young and Katie Roiphe ridicule as a cult of victimization. Young and Roiphe follow Sommers in supporting the concept of "equity feminism," arguing that women must claim the rights and assume the responsibilities that accrue to each individual in a modern democracy. In their view, women who cling to the status of victim demean themselves and threaten the freedom of society at large. In this respect, each takes what I would call strong individualist ground: Women who aspire to compete with men for the benefit of our economy and polity must cultivate independence and self respect—must be prepared, if you will forgive me, to take their knocks like a "man."

There is much to recommend their position, beginning with a basic notion of fairness. If you aim for the gold, you must be prepared to compete

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for it and to compete on equal terms under uniform rules. We do not normally expect even the most talented of disabled athletes to compete head to head with the most talented of those who are not. Occasionally, an exceptional individual surmounts the obstacles of a handicap to enter the general competition, but, to the best of my knowledge, no one ever bent any rules for the one-armed, major league pitcher, Jim Abbott. He won his opportunity to pitch in the major leagues by pitching better than countless less talented aspiring pitchers, and when his fast ball lost something of its velocity and his curve ball lost its curve, he, like any other pitcher, lost his place in the rotation. All that Jim Abbott needed was a playing field that was truly open to all who wished to compete, that did not, in other words, exclude him from the outset because he lacked an arm. The same principles obtained with the entry of blacks into baseball. Jackie Robinson took tougher knocks than most of us can even imagine, but, once he had withstood them, the game was opened to blacks who now command salaries as high as the white players they equal or outshine.

Recent years have nonetheless taught us what we should have already known, namely that even fairness does not always produce equal results—or even results that everyone thinks are fair—and that the myth of the level playing field is, precisely, a myth. Even if everyone were guaranteed genuinely equal access to education, employment, and all the other opportunities our society offers, we know that sooner or later some would begin to drop by the wayside and only a few would ever attain the highest incomes, most influential positions, and most prestigious distinctions. Nature, or genetic endowment, which itself is not a popular concept these days, plays a part. But so do class position, cultural tradition, and family background. Children with resident biological fathers tend to out-perform children of single or divorced mothers, just as the children of parents who own and read books tend to fare better in school than the children of parents who do not. Lack of financial resources normally limits a student's choice of college, and a student who attends an elite private college tends to reap a larger share of the world's rewards than one who does not. Statistics suggest that cultural traditions, frequently associated with race or ethnicity, may powerfully affect a child's ability to compete—sometimes with greater than predictable success as well as with less. These factors, however resistant to precise statistical measurement, help to account for much of the initial support for affirmative action, which was viewed as a way of increasing the representation of that all-too-familiar nostrum of "women and minorities" in positions of affluence, power, and prestige.

In the case of that nebulous and euphemistic group "minorities," the strategy, as you all know, has yielded mixed and frequently disquieting results, and, after a quarter of a century, it has alienated enough of the

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American public to make its future uncertain indeed. In the case of women, hysterical protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, it has worked better than its wildest supporters would have dared to hope. Some undetermined combination of affirmative action, changing popular attitudes, the impact of the global economy, and the myriad consequences of the sexual revolution has effectively catapulted women from wages that averaged less than two-thirds of those of their male counterparts to equal pay for equal work for entry-level workers. Yet, however puzzling at first glance, public sympathy for continued efforts to improve the position of women, or to level the remaining barriers to their success, has apparently survived the widespread impatience with affirmative action for minorities. Now this is genuinely puzzling if not an outright paradox. For although many black Americans, who are those we are most clearly talking about when we talk of minorities, have done exceptionally well indeed, many have not and, indeed, may well have done worse in alarming ways that bode ill for the future prospects of the group as a whole. And the reasons for which so many have floundered have much less to do with "race," than with class, social environment, economic opportunity, and cultural traditions—all of which should be subject to modification, although by what means remains as problematic as ever. To be blunt, the most salient—and arguably intractable—causes of black disadvantage result not from nature but from society, culture, and history. So, however woefully affirmative action has failed, one may reasonably argue that it failed because it was the wrong policy, not because the problems cannot be affected by any policy.

In the case of women, in contrast, affirmative action has produced such impressive results as plausibly to have outlived its usefulness. This success does not mean that women have, in every respect, attained equality with men, since visibly most women have not. What it does mean is that the residual factors that help to explain such persisting disadvantage as women actually suffer may be virtually immune to change through social policies and programs since they derive primarily from nature—or such a deeply ingrained cultural psychology as to be virtually indistinguishable from it. Our public feminist discourse resolutely resists this conclusion, which it dismisses as an acknowledgment that women may never hope to equal men. The evidence nonetheless conclusively demonstrates that, in most arenas, any woman may assuredly equal her male peers and that, in the few in which equality between women and men seems highly improbable, specific forms of physical strength constitute the main requirements. (Here, I am intentionally leaving aside the question of the highest levels of mathematical brilliance since, although the evidence confirms a persisting sexual difference, the numbers are so small and the causes for the difference so controversial as to make discussion inconclusive and speculation presumptuous.)

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What, you may well ask, have the vicissitudes of affirmative action to do with sexual harassment? To which, I should respond, everything. For the very concept of sexual harassment, not to mention the policies and laws that punish it, has taken shape within the same world as affirmative action, namely a world in which women in large numbers have sought or been forced to enter the public world that had previously been dominated by men. No less important, the emergence of that same world has witnessed a decisive weakening of men's domestic hold over women, including a dramatic explosion in single motherhood. In other words, both affirmative action and sexual harassment policies have been intended to minimize the differences in women's and men's ability to compete equally in the same arena for the same rewards. Almost a century and a half ago, Louisa McCord, one of the leading female intellectuals of the antebellum period and a formidable polemicist, challenged the British feminist Harriet Martineau to clarify her understanding of the meaning and probable consequences of equality between women and men. Martineau complained that men, being physically stronger than women, had "frequently, habitually, . . . even invariably, oppressed and misused women." But, McCord countered, equality hardly offers the best means to correct those abuses. For how will women gain from society's pitting woman against man, in a direct stage of antagonism, "by throwing them into the arena together, stripped for the strife; by saying to the man, this woman is a man like yourself, your equal and similar, possessing all rights which you possess, and (of course she must allow) possessing none others. In such a strife, what becomes of corporeal weakness?"

Like the extreme forms of affirmative action, sexual harassment policies may most usefully be understood as weapons in the struggle to guarantee equality of results to women who may not readily be able to hold their own in man-to-man combat. Initially, of course, they served a much worthier and less ambiguous purpose, namely to subject what is now known as quid-pro-quo sexual harassment to the legal sanctions it so richly deserves. We may safely presume that even the most dedicated equity feminists agree that the male supervisor's demand that a female employee have sex with him in order to receive a promotion constitutes egregious behavior that no civilized polity should tolerate. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made sexual harassment of this kind illegal, but the term sexual harassment did not receive full legal definition until the 1980s when the Equal Economic Opportunity Commission formulated guidelines under Title VII to define sexual harassment as necessarily including two of three elements: 1) unwelcome sexual advances; 2) requests for sexual favors; 3) other verbal or physical conduct of a physical nature. Not until the later 1980s did the Supreme Court explicitly expand the

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definition of sexual harassment to include a hostile work environment. And not until the Civil Rights Act of 1991 did sexual harassment plaintiffs gain the right to trial by jury and compensatory damages. Since then, the number of sexual harassment suits has grown exponentially.

According to many feminists, the expanding web of sexual harassment complaints and suits unambiguously confirms men's unflagging determination to dominate women and, especially, to bar them from professional success. And these attitudes have been sufficiently influential to ensure that the rhetoric of sexual harassment codes increasingly emphasizes the abuse of power rather than sex. Presumably, the attitudes also help to account for the EEOC's broad definition of a hostile work environment as: 1) an environment with conduct that is intimidating or offensive; and 2) an environment that interferes with work performance. In fairness, the EEOC has also attempted to design reasonable standards of proof that such an environment actually exists. But even if we grant maximum credit to the Commission's intentions, it remains indisputable that both the designation of behavior as intimidating and the designation of an environment as interfering with work performance depend heavily upon the subjective perceptions of individuals—in this instance, those who believe themselves intimidated or victimized.

The problem of subjective perception brings us back full circle to the problem of victim feminism to which Sommers, Young, and Roiphe have so forcefully called our attention and with which I started. Why does one woman respond to a male co-worker's sexual jokes or slurs with a slap in the face or a retort in kind while another dissolves into a puddle or finds it impossible to perform her responsibilities? These days, the courts try to apply a "reasonable woman" standard, but we remain far from agreement about who constitutes the reasonable woman. While serving as expert witness and consultant for The Citadel, I got a firsthand view of the problem. Shannon Faulkner's lawyers, who themselves were delighted to trade barbs with male lawyers, displayed acute sensitivity to sexual harassment on Ms. Faulkner's behalf. In their hands, a political satire in the student newspaper—written entirely in eighteenth-century idiom no less—was transformed into a shameful example of sexual harassment. Admittedly, the exuberant young journalist referred to Ms. Faulkner as a cow, but, then, he referred to a host of other unnamed characters as members of one or another species of animal.

At the time, Ms. Faulkner was attending The Citadel as a day student, and the charges of sexual harassment were but opening volleys in a much larger war. But as we began to plan for the likelihood of Ms. Faulkner's court-ordered admission to the Corps of Cadets, the worries became more serious. What, for example, would happen should an upperclassman say to

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Ms. Faulkner, "Knob, you don't belong here"? Since Ms. Faulkner was indisputably a woman, one may safely assume that her lawyers would pounce upon such utterances as clear evidence of sexual harassment. Yet no explicitly sexual word would have been uttered. More to the point, the charge that the "knob" does not belong at The Citadel was levied at random at all first-year cadets, frequently several times in one day. So why did Ms. Faulkner's claims to equality, notably her equal right as a woman to be exposed to The Citadel's special form of discipline and abuse, not include her responsibility equally to endure the taunts that she, like the rest of her classmates, is demonstrably not fit to belong to the Corps?

My first point here is that co-educational environments almost inevitably breed such ambiguities, which resourceful feminist activists have been quick to label harassment. The evidence from West Point, although carefully concealed, seems incontrovertible. Since the admission of women, charges of sexual harassment have abounded, and more than seventy-five percent of them are what I would call "soft" sexual harassment along the lines of "knob, you don't belong here." Of course, they are insulting to the dignity of the woman in question. And when they escalate to the level of charges that the woman in question would never have received a specific prize or honor or command had she not been a woman—that she never could have won it in a free competition in which raw ability alone counts—they may well be viewed as hurtful and even as detrimental to the self-confidence of the woman in question. But at West Point we are, after all, talking about the future officer corps of the United States Army, and, at the risk of lacking in sensitivity, it is reasonable to hope that the young egos of this elite would be steeling themselves to withstand much greater challenges to their authority and personal dignity.

Sexual harassment policies depend upon some agreement about who constitutes the reasonable woman, and contemporary experience confirms that few concepts provoke more intense disagreement. The most salient debate for our purposes is nonetheless the one that pits equity feminists against gender feminists. Equity feminists, with considerable justification, insist that women who seek equality should be prepared to shoulder its burdens as well as its rewards. They do tend toward the view that few, if any, substantive differences distinguish women from men, at least in the arenas in which women claim an equal right to individual freedom and its rewards. Gender feminists defend an otherwise more tenuous position, although not because they differ from equity feminists about women's right to the rewards of individual freedom. Their reservations apparently concern the costs that the quest of individualism's rewards may reasonably impose. And here, I confess, it would be easy for me to become very sharp. For those of us who have indeed made our way through the snares and

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thickets of a world in which women were less than welcome, do tend to value highly the ability to succeed by virtue of one's talents, determination, and sheer hard work. We may even be inclined to lose patience with those who insist that the odds are so heavily stacked against them that the world must be coerced into greater sensitivity and friendliness to their specific needs. And, at our less charitable, we may well be tempted to retort, as our grandmothers before us might have: "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

From the perspective of the freedom of our society as a whole, I believe our position has considerable merit. The imposition of speech and sexual harassment codes that aim only to protect the self-proclaimed weak from the allegedly powerful, not to mention the army of bureaucrats whose livelihood depends upon our purported need to be instructed and workshopped to death, assuredly curtails individual freedom and personal responsibility. The climate that nurtures such programs invites all of us to blame someone else for our every failure to attain a desired goal. If women are indeed so vulnerable as to need all this protection, then why do they expose themselves to situations in which they cannot be sure they will be safe from offensive jokes, indelicate stories, and an occasional remark about their appearance or competence? The short answer is that most women, who have children to support or a family income to contribute to, have little choice. And the more energetically a woman seeks to secure and hold the job that will pay her the best, the more likely she is to find herself working cheek to jowl with men, some of whom may resent her presence. To complicate matters further, the workplace frequently offers women their best opportunity to meet a man whom they might wish to date or even, eventually, marry. And we all know that failed romances, not to mention rebuffed advances, constitute emotional tinderboxes of the highest order. Thus, for one reason or another (and there are more than I have enumerated), most women find it difficult simply to leave their femaleness at home. So most of us, in one way or another, confront our male co-workers as both workers, who deserve and should want, equal treatment, and as women, whose sexuality exposes them to specific risks for which they may legitimately want some consideration.

If the gender feminists were only asking that society acknowledge the claims—however defined—of women's potential sexual vulnerability and lesser physical strength, they might have more of a case than I have thus far allowed them. As I understand them, they do not. To the contrary, they apparently yield nothing to the equity feminists in their insistence upon women's right to equality. Indeed, they differ only in how that equality is to be acquired and sustained. Given my limited patience for what I consider fallacious or illogical reasoning, I may do their position something

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less than complete justice. But it is hard not to believe that they are much more interested in equality of results than equality of opportunity, responsibility, or condition. How else are we to understand the myriad claims that women should not be held to the same expectations as men but should reap the same rewards? According to this logic, it is unacceptable to say that the presence of women in a specific workplace—say a construction site, a fire truck, or a police beat—may make men uncomfortable, but positively noble to say that the presence of men intimidates women. You will note that this statement assumes that both women and men as workers will retain some of the common attributes of their sex, whether the degree of physical strength or social reticence or whatever. But then, I do believe that in most instances most women and men do. So what the gender feminists are seeking is to reshape the workplace to conform to the sensibilities of the most "feminine" women workers. And sexual harassment claims have emerged as their weapon of choice. For girls to be free to be girls, boys must be prohibited from being boys, which means that employers are held accountable for their female employee's perception of their male employee's demeanor and behavior.

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 has indisputably given sexual harassment cases an unpredictable new lease on life. The introduction of jury trials and compensatory damages has, for good reasons, encouraged a veritable explosion of sexual harassment claims, which have increased astronomically since its passage. Juries, which are normally composed of ordinary citizens, tend to be sympathetic to plaintiffs, especially when the defendants are large corporations, including universities, which are assumed to be callous towards the needs and feelings of workers. In addition, juries frequently mistrust arguments about qualifications and standards of performance. It is surprisingly difficult to convince a jury that a person who has been hired for a job may not have done enough—or, heaven forbid, may not be smart enough—to merit a promotion or tenure. And if the person who is denied the promotion or tenure happens to be female and happens to have the wit to claim discrimination based upon sex, that person may very well prevail in a jury trial. The likelihood that a jury will sympathize with a plaintiff, combined with the astronomical costs of such legal battles, has led large corporations—and their insurance companies—to settle for almost any amount that does not exceed the projected costs of going to trial. And that willingness to settle in turn feeds a presumption that the plaintiff must indeed have experienced sexual harassment or discrimination. And so, the vicious circle spirals out of control.

Sexual harassment claims have increased in our economy—up two hundred percent or more during the past year—but their most fertile breeding ground is the academy where they have increased by sixty-two

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percent. That fact might well give us pause since arguably the academy is where feminists have built their strongest base and where the quest for "diversity" has been most successful. More daunting, however, is the possibility that the more women succeed, the more sexual harassment suits we will see. If so, we have some hard thinking to do, which might include the acknowledgment that women do, in some ways, differ from men and that we must find ways other than sexual harassment claims to make allowance for the salient differences.

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**TZVETAN TODOROV**

# The Labor of Love

One of the most beautiful novels of the twentieth century, Selma Lagerlöf's *The Emperor of Portugallia*, opens with a scene presenting the birth of a little girl seen through the mind of her father Jan, a wretched agricultural worker, impoverished and generally a failure. Having married somewhat late in life, he now must deal with his wife's pregnancy as it comes to term. After a day spent waiting outside the door, he is now cold and tired, and his mind comes to dwell on the cares that the little one will bring to his household. Still, he enters the birthing room and into his arms is placed a package out of which protrude a worn face and a pair of tiny hands. He suddenly feels his heart beat so powerfully that he is terrified, and is on the verge of asking the women present for help, but they quickly grasp his predicament and burst out laughing. "Have you never cared for anyone enough to set your heart throbbing?" asks the midwife. Jan must concede that he has not, though he now begins to comprehend what is happening to him. Selma Lagerlöf comments that "One who feels his heart beat neither in sadness nor in joy cannot be considered a true human being."

*The Emperor of Portugallia* is the story of a father's mad love for his daughter. It does not take long for us to see that the stakes are not small, either for protagonist or author: the issue to be decided is the question of what makes a person truly human. The question of human identity can be formulated in various contexts, leading to different answers. The findings of the biologist, for example, who attempts to identify the physiological border between man and other animals, will not coincide with those of the paleontologist identifying the starting point for *homo sapiens sapiens*. Lagerlöf's treatment is on yet another level which one might call anthropological, and is contained in one word: Love. The capacity to love is what makes a being human.

It is easy enough to see the beauty or generosity in such a statement, but can one go so far as to assert its truth? Before expressing an opinion on this question, I would remind the reader of another attempt to locate what is specifically human, one that unfolds on the same anthropological level. In the nineteen-thirties, Alexandre Kojève, a young émigré Russian philosopher living in Paris, explained to a small but captivated audience the meaning of the famous "dialectic of master and servant" in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind*; after the war, a member of the audience—none

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other than Raymond Queneau—published these discussions under the title *Reading Hegel: An Introduction*, a work which came to exert an enormous influence on many contemporary authors. As Kojève interprets it, Hegel's response to the question of what is specifically human is very different from Lagerlöf's. What is the difference between animals and humans? The former always acts exclusively out of an instinct for self-preservation, taking for itself all that is necessary to achieve this end (food, for example), and eliminating all obstacles (its rivals). The latter does as much, but is not content to stop there, and seeks more than his mere physiological satisfaction: he aspires to a recognition of his value, which can only come from another. The human, then, begins where "the biological desire for self-preservation" yields to "the human desire for recognition."

It follows that to be human is to be prepared to risk one's life for something greater; to be human is to move beyond the belief that one's own life is the ultimate value. This extreme situation suggests to Kojève the truth underlying any craving for recognition: since all desire it, and since one must first subjugate another in order to obtain something from him, human life becomes a merciless struggle that leads to the emergence of a master (the victor) and a servant. The history of humanity is the history of their conflict and its sequels (or class struggle, as Marx saw it). Kojève then concludes that "human existence, located in history, conscious of itself, is therefore only possible where there are—or have once been—bloody struggles, or wars of prestige." His statement has a dual force: the desire for recognition is specifically human, and anyone driven by this desire is led to take part in a struggle to the death. So it is not love that is specifically human, but war.

Kojève's response is certainly less pleasant than Lagerlöf's, but does that make it any less true? Many of our contemporaries seem to prefer it, likely fearing accusations of affectation awaiting them should they choose the other one. (One of the surprising postulates of contemporary western philosophy is that the truth must be bitter.) For a clearer perspective, rather than examine the problematic appearance of the human race at the dawn of time, let us take a subject that is incomparably easier to observe: the human individual (described, as it happens, in the first chapter of *The Emperor of Portugallia*). The newborn human is not radically different from many of its counterparts among the animals (the higher apes, for example): the child strives to be comforted, warmed, and fed, just as they do. Yet there are nonetheless differences, one of which acquires a special significance. At an age generally of about seven or eight weeks, the infant executes an action that has no equivalent in the animal kingdom: it is no longer enough for it merely to see its mother (which it has been doing since birth); it now seeks to attract her gaze, to be seen by her. To seek out and

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look for the look that sees him: this is the event through which the child enters into a distinctly human world.

Why is this? Because the child, through this action, identifies simultaneously a being beyond itself (the one who must observe him) as well as the independent being that he himself is (the one observed by others). This is no less than the birth of consciousness itself. In this light, we can see that Kojève's thesis is only partially satisfactory. From an anthropological perspective, one may say that a specifically human existence begins with the recognition of what we receive from without, from another. This was already affirmed by Rousseau, the likely inspiration for Hegel on this point: at the dawn of humankind, "each began to observe others, and to wish to be observed himself" (*Inequality*). But not all such recognition necessarily implies a struggle to the death; here we must abandon Kojève. The individual's existence as a specifically human being begins not on a battlefield but in the baby's attraction of his mother's gaze—a situation, it must be said, that few had the opportunity to observe until fairly recently. True, this recognition contains no approval, no value judgment (as Kojève would have it); the mother merely affirms the existence of the child and no more. Yet the significance of this is enormous, since up to this moment the child, as it were, does no more than live; thereafter, he also begins to exist.

There is no humanity without recognition, without society, without intersubjectivity. But without love? We cannot say what its absence would mean for the species as a whole, but we do know that certain individuals, sadly, end up spending their entire lives without knowing love. "Monsieur Hamil, can one live without love?" asks little Momo in Roman Gary's masterpiece *La vie devant soi*. "'Yes,' he said, and lowered his head as if in shame. I began to cry." Yet those who do not know love are still obviously human. Love is not necessary to maintain either life or existence, which is born of recognition rather than love.

Would Selma Lagerlöf disagree with this conclusion? I think not. She had no desire to suggest that Jan was not a human being before the birth of his little girl, but rather that, through his love for her, he realizes his potential identity, the highest element of the human condition. The phrase "true human being" must be understood not as a point of fact but as a value judgment. The best human life (and not mere human life) is lived in love, Lagerlöf seems to say. Has this always been so? It is difficult, if not impossible, to answer this question. We never encounter the feeling of love in itself, but always only its representations. That the latter are constantly in flux does not mean that the same is necessarily true of love. Let us then focus on what we can know through our own intuition: love in the here and now, at the end of the second millennium.

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Lagerlöf's affirmation lies close to my convictions: love is rare, love is difficult, but nonetheless magnificent. Here, rather than seek alternative responses to the same question, I would ask another one: Why is this so? What does love have that makes it the most precious aspect of existence? The narratives of Lagerlöf and Gary are beautiful, but they are no more than a crutch for us here, showing love instead of analyzing it. We must look elsewhere for illumination. Yet there is a preliminary question to be answered: what is love? What do we mean by this word, so banalized from common use?

Fortunately (or perhaps unfortunately), a great many authors have already asked themselves this question; our task here is to learn and understand, rather than invent. For my starting point I would take not a canonical text of the past, but rather common opinion, which consists of at least two elements: first, one must distinguish love from other feelings, primarily friendship and parental (or maternal, as we tend to say) affection. Secondly, love of this sort is based on sexuality, whether sublimated or repressed.

These last two clichés or truisms can be decentered, dislodged from their ruttedness, provided one is willing to give up a few well-established certitudes. This was the approach taken by Erich Fromm, in one of the richest modern essays on the subject, *The Art of Loving*. Fromm begins with the observation that love is an action, an attitude of the subject, and that therefore a definition of it is more than merely the identification of its object; we are dealing with something larger than the simple initiation of contact between two individuals. The love-objects in their variety may of course shape the feeling, but they do not define it completely. Parental love is never confused with sexual love, yet one must still begin by outlining their common traits, familiar to every parent. It is no mistake that Jan—and Selma Lagerlöf—see a perfect example of love in the love of the father for his daughter. So too do Gary and little Momo, who loves—and is in love with—Madame Rosa, the woman who has raised him. The brutal loss of the loved one is a similar experience whether it be a child, a lover, or even a friend or parent.

Freudian psychoanalysis has taught us to see the love which ties us to our parents in childhood (which can also take the form of hatred or resentment) as containing the prototype of our adult loves. Yet a reciprocal implication is often overlooked: that the same love is what links parents to their children. The argument occasionally advanced against making this jump—that love between parents and their children is imposed, while lovers are chosen freely, and hence these are two different types of love—does not hold. First of all, one does not necessarily love one's parents (or children); furthermore, the love one chooses is not born of animal instinct,

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but is based instead on the individual identity of the loved one. But it follows that the second commonplace, according to which love is one expression of sexuality, is equally to be rejected: as Fromm says, "sexual desire" is actually "one manifestation of the need for love and union." The feeling of love may be experienced through the body and the spirit, and may be directed at either lover or friend, parent or child; for all that, it is nonetheless love.

Fromm is right to see love in this way, though he is himself prone to the opposite excess in making the concept too broadly inclusive. Human beings, he says, need contact with others. "The deepest need of man . . . is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness." In this scheme, love would be the most complete satisfaction of such a need. This view does not recognize a specific need for love, but only asserts that the recognition provided by the attention of others allows us to fill in, at least temporarily, our incompleteness; love provides the same recognition, but in this regard it is similar to other human ties. Likewise, Fromm enlarges the notion of love to include the love of oneself, the love of one's neighbor ("fraternal love"), and the love of God, but here he extends beyond the area of interpersonal relationships, excessively altering the sense of the word; I for my part wish to stay within this area.

One might here object that love of one's neighbor, addressed as it is to other humans, therefore merits the name of love. Furthermore, the Greek term for this, *agape*, indicates a kind of love (though nowadays the fashionable translation is more like "charity"). But any comparison of the usual sense of "love" with the term *agape* brings into relief one of love's constitutive aspects. Brotherly love involves all individuals around us, even strangers and enemies. It is a universal love for which the characteristics of the loved one—his qualities or failings—are unimportant. Ideally, I have no need to seek to know the name or face of the one toward whom my charity is addressed, the reason being that, through my neighbor—through any other human being—my love is directed at God. Without this love, I would be guilty, in the Christian view, of the sin of idolatry; we must be led to the Creator, not only to His creations. On the other hand, what we know as love, whether directed at the lover, a friend, or a child, does not allow the substitution of one individual for another; its object is unique and irreplaceable. Here one can see the importance acquired by fidelity, a reformulation of the essential element of love: the unique character of the being that inspires it. To love, at least in principle, is to reserve for this person attitudes and actions that will not be shared with any other—in other words, to love is to be faithful.

By this point, we have outlined a coherent field, corresponding more or less to what everyone understands by the term "love." But we have not

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yet said anything about the feeling itself. Of what does it consist? One answer to this question, provided by classical antiquity, is paradoxical: love is the desire for something, a being that I need or lack; yet if I possessed it, I would desire it no longer. As Socrates says in Plato's *Symposium*, "Who has a desire desires what is not at hand and not present, what he does not have, and what he is not, and that of which he is in need; for such are the objects of desire and love." I love an object that I lack; I can love only in its absence. The only Albertine you can love is the one that is gone. It follows that in order to live, love must remain frustrated, and that once it is attained, love is dead.

This singular property of love would explain, according to this conception, the bizarre strategies in which lovers, more or less consciously, involve themselves. The more its object is accessible, the more love is extinguished; the more difficult the object is to attain, the stronger love burns. Love, in this scheme, is thus intrinsically tragic, giving us the choice of two evils: to suffer because our desire is unsatisfied (She loves me not!), or to be miserable because my desire, now fulfilled, is dead (She loves me, hence I love her no more!). A closer look also reveals the egoism inherent in this view: I must have the other, naturally, but only as a means to keep myself in the state of being in love, not as a value in itself. Here the lover desires love itself more than its object, aspiring to death, the ultimate absence, rather than to life. All of us have experienced this paradox: I am willing to do anything for this person, but only provided she loves me. If, on the other hand, she should cease to love me, then love would turn to hatred: in the end, I would rather have her dead in my arms than alive in those of another.

The paradoxes of desire are seductive to the mind, and lend themselves perfectly to narrative treatment: a quest, suspended then reinitiated, a discovery of unanticipated obstacles. Western literature from Plato to Lacan, from Ovid to Proust and beyond, has not refrained from exploiting these possibilities. Yet it is enough to examine the manifestations of love that we see around us every day to confirm that they are not all of the type that prefers absence to presence, taking to giving, passion suffered to action taken.

Indeed love, which consists of wishing the good of another without reciprocation, coincides with the definition we generally attribute to the good. As Aristotle remarks, to be a good person is to be capable of wishing the good of others without aiming at any particular utility or pleasure (which come anyway when I see the happiness of my friend). Love stands above all moral systems, for when one has love, one needs no moral framework. Is it a moral force that inspires a mother to care for her infant, or a lover to protect his beloved? Morality is merely a supplement for the absence of love.

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When we love, we do not question ourselves, but only let ourselves be drawn towards happiness. Still, to take this road is nonetheless to make a philosophical choice, albeit unconsciously. As we have seen, love, more than any other human relationship, implies the irreplaceable and non-fungible nature of the loved one, who becomes an individual in the strongest sense of the word, a unique being. In reserving our most powerful feelings for an individual in her uniqueness, one elevates her to a pedestal of exception, making of her an absolute value; the loved one becomes "the measure of all things." Viewed through the lens of love, terms like "humanism," "individualism," or "personalism" acquire new meanings, outlining a value system whose summit is occupied by the individual—the very celebration that we know from love: a means to no end beyond herself, irreducible to any other person or idea, inexhaustible in her uniqueness.

Humans feel a need for transcendence, aiming at values beyond their immediate selves, beyond the animal need to assure their own survival. Through their material nature, they are living organisms like all the rest; but their consciousness, enabling them to embrace the totality of the universe and of time, leads them to know the infinite. For millennia, gods—beings that stand above us, incarnations of all values—have satisfied this need for transcendence. Beginning only a few centuries ago, in Europe, people began to doubt the existence of gods, then ultimately pronounced them dead. To escape the anguish of a life devoid of transcendence, other divinities were proposed, ones which had previously played only a secondary role: Nation, the People, the Proletariat, the Tribe, Race, or Community. Twentieth-century totalitarianisms rendered even these less substantial, replacing them with the demand for the worship of a Party and its Leader. Today, we are too familiar with the impasses to which these promises lead to retain our faith in them; does this mean that, at millennium's end, we are without any means of transcendence?

No: we still have the transcendence of love—a strange one, we must confess, if not downright paradoxical, since it dwells in a being similar to ourselves in all respects, rather than superior to us in quality (God) or in quantity (the group). Similar, that is, in all respects except one: this person must stand outside us. It is, as it were, a "lateral" transcendence rather than a "vertical" one. The absolute value takes the form of another being, a face that I see, a You that I adore. This "humanism of the other," to use Levinas's words, this notion of the "defense of one other than oneself" allows us to surmount the sterile antinomies of dogmatism and nihilism, theism and egoism or, on another level, of immanence and transcendence. Transcendental values do indeed exist, but there is nothing supernatural about them; they are simply the individual beings to whom we direct our love, celebrating their existence. Far from living in an age of decadence and

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perdition, we can, by embracing this line of thought, take one more step towards the truth of our condition in venerating the loved one in this way (even if previous ages have not been entirely unaware of this truth). Hence the human race has, in this scheme, the ability to create the infinite using the finite, the absolute using the relative, the eternal using the transitory—to transform the chance event of an encounter into something that becomes a life's necessity. This is why we do not lie when we declare that "I shall always love you," even though most of the time this prediction proves false; these words are the manifestation of our will to see the absolute, expressed within the framework of our gray existence.

But is the loved one, the unique and irreplaceable one, sufficient for us in all circumstances? This may reasonably be doubted. The irreducibleness of the individual, and of love, may illuminate the private world, but they are of scant service in the public sphere, the political world, a sphere whose values cannot be reduced exclusively to those of human rights. Hannah Arendt asserts that in ancient Greek culture "whoever had only a private life . . . was not entirely human." The cornerstone of political life, though, is neither love nor the individual (from a political standpoint, individuals are not unique, but become equivalent and interchangeable), but rather the common good. Is this then a new absolute value, comparable to that of the individual—and therefore its rival? In the past it was possible to believe in an absolute political good, but the result was always disastrous. Our ideal is not a perfect world, but only a better one. We refuse to impose a uniform notion of the good on everyone, though we can still agree on what constitutes its opposite, and strive to attenuate that. We are aware that a society is made up of divergent forces, and hence that the search for the common good involves cooperation and compromise, coalitions and concessions. In other words, political life in a democracy, in practice, knows only relative values. This distinguishes it from private life, which is dominated by an absolute: the irreducible human individual.

Rousseau, that tragic thinker of modernity, well understood that "the more one increases his attachments, the more he multiplies his pains" (*Emile*, V.). What, then, is to be done? Certain sages have believed themselves to have discovered remedies for this solution. The Stoics recommend avoidance of excessive attachments, and that we seek enrichment within ourselves. Augustine, at the death of his closest friend, did not yet know God's love; after discovering it, he writes: "Miserable is every soul fettered by the love of perishable things—he is torn in pieces when he loses them." (*Confessions*, IV. 6) Only the love of God is proof against suffering, for God is immortal and infallible. But is it not too high a price to pay to renounce worldly love in order to protect oneself against the unhappiness that awaits us? Dido, in the *Aeneid*, undergoes unbearable suffering at the departure of

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Aeneas, yet still manages to recall that it is the animals who escape love: "Why might not I, alas, have mourned away / My widow'd youth, as well as turtles do?" (IV. 550–1) Gods and animals may do without, but not humans. The risk involved is the price of happiness, which cannot be achieved by other means. The boundless love of Jan for his daughter brings him madness and death, but he prefers this to a barren, loveless existence. The peasants of his village recognize after his death that "this man had perhaps the richest and warmest heart in the land." Little Momo, in *La vie devant soi*, has a brush with madness and death as a result of the love he has for Madame Rosa, and still his last words are these: "One cannot but love."

**Translated from the French by Jim Tucker**

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VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

# Resurrecting Utopia: The Search for Myth Under Post-Communism

Myth and magic are phenomena that belong to both archaic and modern societies. The Third Reich, Stalin's Russia, Fidel's Cuba cannot be understood in the absence of these concepts: the myth of the leader, of the Fatherland, of the revolution. At the same time, developed industrial democracies have their own mythologies: these constellations of compelling ideas and emotions organize collective interests, passions, animosities, and even antagonisms. "Law and order," "family values," "manifest destiny," "equal opportunity," "technological progress," or "new world order" are examples of constructions of the mind that inspire simultaneously intense positive or negative attitudes. Political mythologies are not atemporal archetypes, existing outside the environment of human history. They react to and evaluate existing forms of human organization, legitimize or expose political structures, and often propose either past or future-oriented alternatives.

Myths also provide an emotive standard by which to judge the changing reality. For instance, the myth of an "originally humanist Marxism," supposedly betrayed by Lenin and Stalin, helped the critical Marxists of East-Central Europe—the "revisionists"—formulate their rejection of bureaucratic socialism and contributed to the dispelling of the official hierophany. Similarly, the Trotskyites and other oppositionists attacked Stalin in the name of the ideal patterns of an "original Bolshevism" that the general secretary had allegedly abandoned in his quest for absolute power. The odyssey of *perestroika* and the meaning of Mikhail Gorbachev's tantalizing endeavor to revise the foundations of Bolshevism cannot be grasped unless we see them as part of a search for the resurrection of the heroic cultural ethos of revolutionary beginnings.

Indeed, when societies tend to lose their center and polarize themselves along belligerent lines, myths not only try to explain reality, but also act upon it and even supplant it. Individuals get entrapped in the mythological discourse, accept its axiomatic premises and refuse to question its allegations. Demagogues, tribunes, and prophets emerge who can articulate collective hopes and anxieties in the most aggressive ways. These are mythologists who know how to stimulate fears and ecstasies, illusions and

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redemptive expectations. An illustration for this is the contemporary resurgence in the United States of anti-"Big Government" sentiments and their exploitation by different political actors. As Norbert Frye noticed, the mythological universe is made up of human hopes and desires and anxieties.

In times of historical confusion, when the old certainties have collapsed and the new ones are still inchoate, these mythologies play a significant role in alleviating human suffering and disorientation. Whether they guide humans into more or less free forms of life is another story, to be sure. The twentieth century's radicalisms were the repository of political myths: to attain the promised Holy Grail, to reach the ultimate, sacred unity and pacified existence, no price was too high.

The total ideologies of Communism and Fascism held in common a belief in the plasticity of human nature and in the possibility of transforming it in accordance with some utopian blueprint. Both Marxism and Fascism have inspired unflinching loyalties, a fascination with the figure of the perfect society and romantic immersions in collective movements promising the advent of the millennium. Fascism was historically defeated during World War II, but, as we have seen in recent years, its echoes continue to be present and resurface each time conditions deteriorate and individuals find themselves under unbearable psychological constraints.

Beyond its historical context, there is a psychological and social matrix to which Fascism responds: the rejection of modern institutions and practices, the repudiation of reason in the name of some primeval, vitalistic instincts, the cataclysmic celebration of soul against intellect, etc.

In the mid 1990's the attraction of significant sectors of the Western intellectual left toward the writings of Carl Schmitt, who was, at least until 1936, the legal theorist of the Third Reich, is not simply cultural fashion. Its roots are to be found in the common dissatisfaction with liberalism and the yearning for a solution that would avoid the "mediocrity" of parliamentary democracy.

Meanwhile, the shock of modernity, the difficult adjustment of individuals to the collapse of traditional communities and solidarities, and the inner tensions of still fragile democracies have engendered popular and some intellectual interest in the former communist societies in "recovered" history and myth instead of liberal ideas and institutions. Among the most forceful myths have been the the myth of the nation, of the heroic past, of the victimized community, and the simultaneous glorification and stigmatization of the West. Not unlike the Western anti-liberal thinkers examined by Stephen Holmes in his *Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (1993), East European political myth-makers, both between the World Wars and after the collapse of communism, looked backward and were inspired by the visions of an homogenous community presumably ruined by the advent of modernity.

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Political mythologies are not ideologies, but they share with ideology the mobilizing drive by presenting the appearance of a coherent narrative. Indeed, as they are often described, myths are stories, but they have an enchanting power, and they tend to favor the emotional elements rather than the rational ones. Especially in times of dramatic transformations (as for instance the 1930s, with the Great Depression, or the periods of post-Cold War and post-Communism), people experience frustration and uncertainty about the future and the breakdown of well-established patterns of conduct and expectations. New chiliasms emerge and individuals look for thaumaturgic, shamanistic solutions to their ordeals. In such times there is the temptation among disparaged, dispossesed, and alienated individuals to espouse a mythological construct, or an Armaggedon-like salvationist paradigm, that historian Norman Cohn has described in his classic book *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1961) as the central fantasy of revolutionary eschatology.

Political ideologies claim to offer systematic responses to human questions about the best organization of societies. This pretense is indeed the crux of what we may call the ideological hubris: the firm belief that there is one and only one answer to the social questions, and that the ideologue is the one who holds it. By projecting a certain model as superior to any other and predicting that society will eventually move in that direction, ideologies are often political teleologies. Their arrogance is matched only by their coercive impetus and exclusive rejection of any competitor. Ideologies are all-embracing and all-explanatory: they refuse dialogue, questioning, doubt. In this respect, liberalism is an ideology only in name: with its incrementalism and skepticism regarding any ultimate solutions to human problems, it lacks the soteriological, apocalyptic power of radical visions of change.

In the 1960s, Daniel Bell announced the extinction of the modern ideological impetus. Industrialism and consumerism, no less than the general disappointment with the disasters provoked by radical universalisms or radical particularisms, made ideologies obsolete. According to that view, humanity has ushered in a post-ideological age.

What has happened in reality does not confirm this assessment: ideologies have continued to motivate collective movements of protest, but in a less coherent and methodic way than in the past. Think of the social movements in Europe in 1968 and the revolutionary wave of the 1970s in Latin America. With the breakdown of Leninism, however, a crucial threshold was crossed. The revolutions of 1989–1991 dealt a mortal blow to the ideological pretense according to which human life can be structured in accordance with a scientific design proposed by a general staff of revolutionary doctrinaires. Some acclaimed these revolutions precisely

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because they were non-teleological and non-ideological. Actually, they were anti-utopian precisely because they refused to pursue any predetermined, foreordained blueprint. With the exception of some nebulous concepts like "civil society," "return to Europe," and "popular sovereignty," these revolutions occurred in the absence of ideology.

In spite of its hazy connotations or precisely because of them, the idea of civil society energized large human groups and allowed them to pass the system-imposed threshold of fear. What succumbed during that unique moment of human emancipation was the most vainglorious utopia in history. Indeed, what came to an end in 1989 was not history, but rather the oracular pretense that history has one sense and that a certain group has the epistemic privilege to identify it and impose its conclusions, as formulated by one or two philosophers, on all humanity.

Communism, as formulated by Marx and Lenin, had sacralized history, turned it into a myth in the name of which all sacrifices were justified. At the very core of Marxism one finds a millennialist mythology, a social dream about a perfect world where the ancient schizoid conflict between man and society, between essence and existence, would have been transcended. The future-oriented spectre of communism is telling humanity that a Golden Age is about to arrive and the leap from the valley of tears to the city of light and bliss can be undertaken in this world, as an ultimate historical convulsion. More than anything else, Marxism represented a spectacular invitation to human beings to engage in a frantic search for the City of God. This human adventure has failed, but the deep needs for which Marxism tried to provide an answer have not come to an end.

Now that the Leninist order has been overthrown, the moral landscape of post-communism is one marred with moral confusion, venomous hatreds, unsatisfied desires, and endless bickerings. This is the bewildering, often terrifying territory on which political mythologies make a return. Fascism, for instance, can make a comeback because, as we know from catastrophic experience in the twentieth century, it represents a paroxysmal answer to the discomfitures of modernity. But post-Cold War Fascism will not be an exact replica of the inter-war mythology.

People of the former communist world, from Tbilisi to Prague, and from Vladivostok to Tirana, have been exposed to the same Leninist experiment. One may of course smile at the naïveté of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who thought that Sovietism really represented a new civilization. At the same time, one cannot deny that it symbolized an ensemble of habits, norms, attitudes and emotions deeply inculcated in the individual's psyche. Once the old regime was overthrown, euphoria reigned supreme. Then people realized how powerful the cultural legacies of Leninism were and that the pre-Leninist past for many of these countries

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was not one of liberal values. East Germany, for example, had not experienced democracy since the destruction of the Weimar Republic by the Nazis in 1933. De-Nazification in that part of Germany amounted basically to the elimination of all political adversaries lumped together as enemies of "the people's democracy." The myth of the Aryan nation was simply replaced with the myth of the "first German state of the workers and peasants." According to this myth, the German proletariat did not cooperate in Hitler's genocidal policies and National Socialism was simply the most extreme form of the bourgeois counter-revolution. During the first years of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht and his associates deported to Buchenwald not only former Nazis, but also Social Democrats, liberals of all sorts, and other opponents of any political despotism.

Not much different were Bulgaria, Hungary, and even Poland, where the democratic and pluralist moments were interludes rather than durable political stages. One can thus extend Umberto Eco's analysis of fascism to communism's inheritance: "... even though political regimes can be overthrown, and ideologies can be criticized and disowned, behind a regime and its ideology there is always a way of thinking and feeling, a group of cultural habits, of obscure instincts and unfathomable drives." ("Ur-Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995). Even if communism as an ideologically-inspired autocracy is dead, what remains is a nostalgia for the pseudo-equality, solidarity, even fraternity that the Bolshevik model simulated. This is the ground on which successor mythologies can emerge.

Post-communist fascism is of course one of these. When people are scared of the avalanche of risks, when they have all their icons crushed and traditional boundaries (mental and social) explode, they turn toward their past. This past is often idealized, romanticized, mythologized. It acquires a unique consoling power. People listen to the mythographers who tell them that their present agonies are abnormal, unnatural, that they are just the result of "plots" fomented by aliens. They try to find a refuge in tradition, in the cult of ancestry, and in the exaltation of primordial roots. Indeed, the post-communist world is the optimal territory for the rise of new varieties of fascism that would fuse leftovers of the Bolshevik model and psychological features of fascist salvationism.

The buds of this fusion can be detected in most, if not all, post-communist societies. These new mythologies are vindictive and compensatory: they promise immediate gratification by offering uniforms, marches, uplifting symbols, and easy targets for stigma and thus superiority. The new mythologies inherit from Leninism its Manichean simplicity, its basic allergy to any heretic temptation, while eliminating the systematic form. They are deliberately vague, protean, easily revisable. Russian demagogue

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Vladimir Zhirinovski's ludicrous statements about deporting whole groups, reconquering the Baltic states, and restoring the empire through military force should not be dismissed as simple bufoonery (although there is a clownish element in his performances): such statements stir responsive chords among many demoralized and outraged former Soviet citizens who still do not see how was it possible for their great Fatherland to have fallen apart. Similar rhetoric ensured the mass appeal of Gennady Zyuganov and his Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

The end of communism has left individuals with a sense of loss: even if they hated their cage, at least it offered the comfort of stability and predictability. Like former prisoners, they now have freedoms but do not know exactly what to do with them. Under these circumstances, they are ready to espouse the rhetoric of the tribe with its emphasis on group identity and community values. The neuroses of the transition period, the collective fear of a general collapse, the closing of the historical horizon and the anger at the new economic barons, *les nouveaux riches*, no less brazen and amoral than Balzac's characters in *La comédie humaine*, nourish sentiments of revolt, distress, and intolerance. There is a need to find scapegoats, to identify those culpable for the ongoing sorrows. The political myth of lost and reconquered ethnic unity serves precisely this purpose: to explain defeats and alienation and reassure the individual that he or she has a place within the *völkisch* community. Nativism and xenophobia merge in these new resentful constellations.

Under these conditions, the easiest way to find the scapegoat is to look for those who do not belong (ethnically or religiously), the inner enemy, potential traitors, intruders, "cosmopolitans." Traditionally, the xenophobic imagination assigned this role to the Jews: they were essentialized as internationalists, linked to modern institutions, to the rise of financial capital, to money and banks, and to communism and radicalism. They appear as the embodiment of what the nationalist mind fears most. The enemy has to be constructed in order to give the mythology of the besieged nation coherence and inflammatory power.

The hypnotic effervescence of such political myths is directly related to the vivid invocation of both its positive and negative "heroes." New exclusionary mythologies attack any expression of doubt about the predestined mission of the nation. The normal and understandable need for identity and belonging is turned into an absolute. Critical intellectuals who refuse to join the national chorus of self-congratulation are accused of treason. To doubt the immense wisdom of the national leader is seen again as a form of betrayal. When the country is presumably surrounded by vicious enemies, when internal fiends constantly conspire against the nation's very survival, any expression of disagreement is by definition

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treacherous. These themes appear obsessionally in the discourse of the "black-red" coalition in Russia: the war in Afghanistan was lost, nationalist writer Aleksander Prokhanov claims, because of domestic traitors. As in Weimar Germany, post-Leninist Russia is replete with pamphlets denouncing the "stab in the back" that led to the Soviet empire's end. The new mythologies are indeed syncretic: they combine a nostalgia for the social osmosis of the communist state (the myth of equality) with the celebration of authoritarian, even fascist traditions.

The new mythologies are often demonologies: Jews and liberal intellectuals are unified in the figure of the nihilist foes of the country's imperial status. The October Revolution is presented as a German-Jewish plot against Russia. These new mythologies, especially if they try to evoke cultural predecessors, draw from the most unexpected sources: racist ideologues of the nineteenth century, romantic poets, Christian fundamentalists from the West, and the whole subterranean tradition of European conspiracy theories (anti-Semitic, anti-Masonic, anti-Jesuit).

The new exclusionary mythologies execrate the difference and the alterity. They impose a vertical, strictly masculine, indeed phallocratic vision of the good society. Parliamentary governments are criticized for their impotence, softness and failure to deal drastically with the enemies of the nation. The persecution of sexual minorities is accompanied by a condescending, patriarchal treatment of women. Both Russian Nazis and the members of the Pamiat society are proud of their black uniforms. They enjoy hatred as a most exhilarating experience. Their sentences are short. They don't need arguments. Complexity, as much as diversity, is their enemy. The simpler their statements, the better.

For a Romanian, Hungarian or Slovak chauvinist, the Jew or the Gypsy is by definition inferior. Even their economic success is an indication of some devious machinations. Hence the insistence on origins and the obsession with purity. Hence the need for Russian chauvinists to demonstrate that Lenin was of Jewish origin, and that his whole Politburo was nothing but a disguised Sanhedrin. The whole twentieth century was nothing but a battle between the occult force of Jewish (liberal) experts in dissolution and the defenders of national, organic values. Any rational questioning of the mythological premises of such views is immediately denounced. Exclusionary mythologies operate on the semantic sterilization of discourse and the anesthetization of critical faculties. They are obsessed with homogeneity, unity, and purity.

All communities have a need to indulge in fantasies of origin, but when these references become monomaniacal, when the emphasis is entirely on the uniqueness of the given group, its special role in the world, and consequently, the foreign threats to its prosperity or very survival, nationalism

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gets pathological. Colonized nations do need national pride as an incentive in their struggle for liberation. But once the old colonial bounds have been broken, civic virtues must be considered as part of the new national ethos. Otherwise, these countries will continue to experience suicidal adventures and cyclical waves of patriotic hysteria. This is the type of tribal self-centeredness Eugène Ionesco analyzed in the aftermath of World War II when he wrote that Romania's tragedy had been nationalism.

No term of abuse is sufficient for the promoters of the new mythologies of envy and ressentiment when it comes to denouncing the evils of liberal society. Pluralism is by definition a plot allowing the profiteers to make it under the new regime. Parliamentarism is inept, effete, divisive. Homogeneity is perveived as a sacred value, and any fragmentation is conducive to defeat. Organic community has been destroyed by the invasion of bourgeois modernity. The theme is not new. French nationalist writer Charles Péguy wrote at the beginning of this century: "We'll never tire of repeating it. All the evil comes from the bourgeoisie. All the aberration, all the crime. It is the capitalist bourgeoisie which has infected the people. And it has infected it with a bourgeois and capitalist spirit." Indeed, for the intruder to be the poisonous factor, the mythological "people" must be imagined as pure, untouched by the evils of industrial, mercantile civilization.

Language itself corrupts, as Rousseau claimed in his famous dream of a community stripped of language ("on chantera au lieu de parler"—people will sing instead of speaking). Modernity is noisy, envenomed, corrupt and corrupting. Bourgeois values, with their soulless, artificial, mechanic connotations, destroy the Ur-community, the brotherhood of origins. Nostalgia for the Russian *zadruga* (pre-capitalist agrarian community) motivates Solzhenitsyn, as much as yearning for village values inspires nationalists from Serbia, Romania, or Hungary. These myths have accompanied the rise of modernity in Europe and elsewhere, but they tend to be particularly poignant in times of crisis. And the post-communist era is such a period of fracture, of interruption in the existential cycle of individuals. Anguish and frustration, malaise and insecurity dominate existence.

It is like a return to Rousseau's dream of the perfectly unified community, in which the individual finds perfect shelter, being finally protected against the pitfalls of solitude. Good institutions, this view holds, are the ones that allow the ego to lose identity in transcendent collectivity. Once, such a community had been the "Party" with its "oceanic" mystique of fraternal solidarity. The Nation, in turn, is the substitute for the total community, for the lost father figure: in the nation one finds solace and security, a refuge from the vicissitudes of wild competition and ruinous

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selfishness. In dealing with post-commmunist perplexities, we have to discover the role of mentalities, their persistence in spite of the break-up of institutions. Whatever its cruelties, and they were countless, whatever its barbarism, which was indeed abysmal, Leninism attacked the very foundations of the ancient communitarian cohesion. It did not create a sense of individual autonomy, but it did bring industry and urban life into most of these societies.

The revolt against Leninism included a negative counterpart— a revolt against the distorted modernity it had ferociously imposed on these nations. Most citizens resented the Leninist commissar's iron fist, and his imposition of urban life, destruction of village life, aggression against archaic, pastoral, traditional values. Leninism, which was a Russian variation on the Western socialist dream of modernization, has profoundly and destructively shaken these societies. Too little liberalism existed in the region after World War I for the pursuit of such a radical agenda of restructuring, except in Czechoslovakia. In most of these countries during the interwar period, strong millennial movements of the extreme right engaged in visceral attacks on liberal democracy. The Romanian Iron Guard, with its spiritualist pageants and cult of heroic death, was only the most visible among them. And the aftermath of Leninism's collapse has therefore witnessed the resurgence of these communitarian, neo-romantic mythologies of belonging and origins.

The question, therefore, is what polity the East European nations will hold to. Will they choose the problematic, dubiously created modern society as it emerged as part of "socialist industrialization," or will they return to the previous cult of autarchic community and profoundly anti-Western sentiments? Will the nativist, romantic-populist forces that have been resurrected in post-communist societies get the upperhand, or will they be defeated by the partisans of Westernization and liberal modernity? The socialist dream of reconciling modernity (industrial dynamism) and community (the reduction or elimination of plurality and diversity, especially of private property as a source of social differentiation) failed. Russia, Ukraine, and East-Central Europe as a whole once again face the old dilemma: accepting the Western route to modernity, or retrenchment into the values of the *Volk*, the village, archaic roots, the tribe. The importance of the anti-modern myth is thus critical for understanding both pre- and post-communist anti-liberalism. Part of anti-communist rhetoric half a decade after the collapse of communism concealed in effect a secret fear: that the post-communist polis will continue communism's onslaught on rural, communitarian, and traditional values. Hence, the immediate successor societies have experienced immoderate calls for punishment and the rise of neo-populist, often anti-Western movements of anger. Given the

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presence of these new or not so new mythologies and their tremendous impact, one wonders whether the past can be overcome or if instead it is an albatross that will ruin any effort to create genuinely open societies.

In the information age, with the burgeoning of the Internet, it is hard if not impossible to erect walls obstructing communication. Of course, it is much too early to hand down devastatingly negative verdicts about the illiberal nature of the regimes which succeeded the communists. These regimes combine various features, some of them liberal, others semi-authoritarian. Presidentialism is a serious danger in many of the newly established democracies. The revolutions of 1989-91 released enormous civic energies, and one cannot see all these efforts to recreate public spheres as mere neo-Jacobin experiments in majoritarian tyranny. To be sure, the liberal project, or the Enlightenment agenda associated with modernity, is in danger in post-communist societies (and not only there). But vibrant forces strongly committed to pluralism and the free market also exist. Whatever one may think of the Russian elites in the mid-1990's, they tend to be consensual in their espousal of a Western-style economic model. And this is true for the East European elites as well.

The transition to a liberal order threatened comforts, entrenched habits, and mental structures. This is the reason for the resurrection of mythologies and the drive for a new utopia. People feel a loss of unity, a sense of strangeness in this world. Sooner rather than later, these societies have to make decisive choices: either to embrace the values of individual autonomy, accepting an order based on tensions, contradictions, and risk, or to reject modernity in the name of collective dreams of salvation, expectations of full coherence within the community as defined by tradition, ancestral customs, and tribal norms. The first choice is anti-utopian; the latter neo-utopian.

In all the societies exiting from communist dictatorship, the need for stability and normality endures. But the meaning of these terms differs from one group to another. As unemployment rises and living standards plummet, many feel an attraction to easy solutions and convenient explanations for their dismal condition. While it is true that people have overcome the fear of the secret police, they may not be protected from the new mafias, corruption, and the old political barons turned new economic robber barons. Liberalism, as it takes shape in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, remains indebted to a cult of pragmatic opportunities, technocratic effectiveness and rationality that many individuals find unsatisfactory.

What future remains for religion in these societies? What bonds will keep the community together in the new liberal order? The critique of Western values formulated by Solzhenitsyn in the 1980s has found echoes

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among many intellectuals from the region: it is not simply capitalism that is challenged or denied, but also the absence of an exhilarating vision that would preserve a connection with the sacred. The major weakness of liberalism is, according to this view, its coldness. This search for the transcendent is part of political myth that does not belong to the post-communist universe only. "Not by bread alone" is a call that comes from the beginnings of civilization and voices a need for deep spiritual values. Some of these values surface in the elusive discourse of myth.

The return of political myth is thus an expression of the crisis of late modernity. It is a more visible phenomenon in societies where the project of Enlightenment was derailed or simply rejected. Thus, in the East as well as in the West, technology and pragmatic procedures alone cannot answer deep human psychological neeeds. Myth is the glue of society. Its denial cannot last forever. Political parties are increasingly distrusted and uninspiring and there exists a pressing need for new forms of activism. This explains perhaps the growing popularity of terms like "civil society," "grassroots democracy," and "new social movements": they are bound to express the recovery of civic dignity, participation, and the possibility of a political project that reconciles truth with effectiveness. Whether these terms represent new political myths, or utopian projects, no one knows.

SONYA RUDIKOFF

1927-1997

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FICTION

**JON SURGAL**

# Armageddon Is Coming And I Have Nothing To Wear

North Vietnamese troops entered Saigon on a Wednesday. Mick McCool had not eaten since the weekend, which took some of the satisfaction out of it for him. The magazine was two weeks late with his check. It was something that happened more frequently than not, and he did not like to complain about it until it was absolutely necessary. He did not like the idea of admitting to hunger. It was one of a number of things that were wrong with his life that he did not like the idea of admitting, one of which was the let-down feeling he had about the war being over.

When he got to the door of Heimlich's office he found Heimlich's wife sitting behind the desk, sighting down the barrel of a water pistol. She was giving it all her concentration. Mick stood there in the doorway with the water pistol pointing at his face. He shrugged and put up his hands. Heimlich's wife gave him a small grudging laugh. She threw the water pistol into a drawer and pushed the drawer closed and picked up her cigarette from the ashtray on the desk.

"Sit down," she said. "I thought you were the asshole I live with."

"No ma'am." Mick sat down. "Just the asshole who works for him."

"Did he send you in to see if the little woman is still pissed off?"

"I haven't seen him."

"Right."

"Rumor reaches me he's out of the building."

"Right, right."

"I haven't seen him, Joyce."

"He sent you to tell me that?"

"He didn't send me anywhere or anything including he didn't send me my paycheck he owes me is one thing he didn't send me for starters."

Heimlich's wife took a deep drag on her cigarette.

"Okay," she said finally, "so we're both getting fucked. At least you get paid for it." She stood up abruptly and flipped her cigarette out the window. "I've got a great idea," she said. "Why don't you ask me out for a cup of coffee and see what happens."

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* * *

"Open the menu at least for God's sake," Heimlich's wife said. "Order something."

"I had a big breakfast." Mick fished the ice cubes out of his water glass and dropped them in the ashtray. Just looking at the ice cubes made his teeth hurt. He pushed the ashtray across the table, away from him.

"You look *morbid*," Heimlich's wife insisted. "You've got that refugee poster-boy look. Force yourself now, this is on me."

"No really." Mick did not want to talk about food. The hunger was so swollen in him that the whole idea of eating made him feel sick. "I mean what are you doing around here anyway. Aren't you supposed to be like working?"

Heimlich's wife handed her menu to the waiter. "Corned beef on rye. And a Cel-Ray Tonic. And give him—I don't know, give him the same thing. And soup. Give him a humongous *bowl* of soup."

"No really," Mick said.

"What kind of soup for the gentleman?" the waiter asked him.

"Chicken soup," Heimlich's wife said. "Naturally."

"Naturally," the waiter said. He reached over and collected Mick's menu.

Heimlich's wife took out a cigarette and lit it and leaned across the table. She had the confiding look on her. "I've been in this fucking *coma*," she said, "for three *days* now."

"Two corned beef," the waiter said, "two Cel-Ray and one humongous chicken soup for the gentleman."

"I think I missed a transition."

"They've got me hooked up to a life-support system. A coma, you know? And they're having this humongous fucking argument over whether-not they're gonna pull the plug. Althea wants'm to pull the plug so I won't tell Christine about her and Jeffrey. Only old Doctor Matthew's got his eye on her, though. He's all for keeping the old plug in the old socket. Only Doctor Matthew's going on vacation and Ken is on Althea's side cuz of the twins and so is Susan cuz of Neal cuz just before I went into this coma he decided once and for all he wanted to marry me and give up the priesthood, for *good* this time, so meanwhile they're having this great big socio-theological *thing* and meanwhile the network is not returning my agent's calls so *meanwhile* I don't have any lines to learn and I'm not even on camera until Friday when they come in for this big fucking close-up of me all zonked out and probably drooling all over the fucking *pillow* when Susan comes sneaking in to pull the plug and by that time I'll have either signed my contract or I'll tell them where to stick it. Which is where, believe you

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me, the sun is seldom *wont* to shine. Which will more or less determine whether this little cowgirl sur*vives*. Is the bottom line. So I thought I'd stop by and visit. Not that I expect great outpourings of empathy from the asshole. Is anyway how I happen to be in the neighborhood."

"Listen," Mick said finally. "You're upset."

Heimlich's wife took a reflective drag on her cigarette. Then she put her elbow on the table and she put her chin on the back of her hand and she blew the smoke out her nose. She flicked the ash into her glass of water. "No shit, Sherlock," she said. "What gave you your first clue."

"Look," Mick said. "If you want to talk about it." He made a vague gesture. He was not entirely sure that he wanted to listen.

"I don't know. No. You know what it is? I'll tell you what it is. This is what it is, all right? This is the *problem*. You ready? This is it: Armageddon is coming *and I have nothing to wear*."

"I know what you mean," Mick said.

"Don't please give me that shit, all right? You know what I *mean*. All right, what do I *mean*."

Mick shrugged. He did not want a scene. He brought up the Hemorrhoids of Young Werther look.

"Basically," he said, "pain sucks."

Heimlich's wife looked at him a long time through the smoke from her cigarette.

"Whatta you say," she said finally. "You get rid of whatsername. I get a divorce *she said eagerly*. Let's get married."

Mick smiled at her. He shook his head.

"Who would have us?" he asked her.

Heimlich's wife laughed hard through her nose. She began to cough. She was laughing and coughing at the same time and flicking the ash from her cigarette into her glass of water. She could not stop coughing. Mick pushed his own glass across the table to her. She bent over and sipped from it, waving one hand in the air to keep his attention. She sat back finally and caught her breath. "Let me tell you," she said, "what the asshole said yesterday."

Mick could not bring himself to concentrate.

* * *

"One humongous chicken soup," the waiter said. "Eat, before it gets cold."

". . . a little consideration," Heimlich's wife was saying. Mick thought at first that she was reproaching him for not paying attention to her, or not paying attention to the waiter, or not being able to fix her life. "I mean all of us are dying," she said. "Every minute of every day. You'd think it would give us something in common, for God's sake. Eat your soup."

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Mick stared at the soup. The surface was full of little oil slicks.

"I mean," Heimlich's wife said, "some things *just aren't funny*."

Mick thought it best to nod solemnly. "You've noticed that too, have you." The oil slicks seemed to be moving around under their own power.

"You better eat that soup," Heimlich's wife told him.

Mick dutifully lifted a spoonful of soup and blew on it and swallowed it. He felt a swell of nausea rise up from his stomach as if the soup had dislodged it.

"You know what he wanted me to do?" Heimlich's wife asked him. "I'll tell you what he wanted me to do. This is what he wanted me to do, all right? He wanted, he asked me, he wanted me to *do* you. He asked me didn't I appreciate the irony. Appreciate the fucking *irony,* right? I think he wanted to watch. I mean what do you think about that. I mean I'm married to a fucking cartoon. I mean you're a cartoonist, give me the benefit of your insight."

Mick swallowed another spoonful of soup. He did not look at her. He sat there eating soup, trying to put a lid on the nausea, trying not to think about it.

"Listen Joyce," he said finally. "There is one thing you have to understand about him is he is basically what you might call a religious man."

"This is true," Heimlich's wife nodded. "Also true is I am Mahatma Gandhi in drag."

Mick knew he could not walk away from this. He felt an obligation here. It was necessary to explain. "What he is," Mick said, "he's a religious man looking for a religion, okay? This is a guy he's made a whole career out of something to offend everyone. Nothing is sacred. Okay. See I figure what he's got, he's got all this great Talmudic guilt left over from his childhood and nothing to hang it on. So that's the thing, his this whole obsession with the *profane*. I figure this is just one big invitation for the God of Wrath to *smite* him."

Mick pushed the soup away from him. He was suddenly unable to look at it. "The point," he said, "is if God's gonna *smite* you, He's gotta *be there* to do it. He's gotta make Himself manifest. He's gotta show Himself. If you sin—and you get your wrist slapped by a fucking *thunderbolt*—then God exists. That's proof. You got no faith, you need proof."

Mick's face was sweating. Another swell of nausea rose up from his stomach.

"Look," he said. He could not leave it alone. Heimlich's wife had her head cocked to one side. She was watching him carefully. Mick could not decide whether or not she was humoring him. He could not tell how irrational he was sounding. "Look," he said again. "This is the point, this, this is a man who believes in *sin* is why he does this stuff. He's giving God the

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finger. He's waiting for the thunderbolt. He wants to see God."

Mick sat back in his chair. He was sweating hard. He needed to put a lid on it. His throat began to tighten, though, and he could tell he was going to vomit.

"All I'm saying," he mumbled, looking around for the men's room, "is I think he's basically a religious man."

Heimlich's wife took one last drag on her cigarette and dinched it in her glass of water. The cigarette went dead with a hiss of terminal agony. It turned brown and sank to the bottom of the glass.

"Personally," Heimlich's wife said, "I think he's a fag."

* * *

Generalisimo Francisco Franco died on a Wednesday, and Heimlich's Winter Of Our Discontent party took place three days later.

Mick stood outside the door listening to the music and the chatter coming from inside the apartment. He did not feel like making an entrance. He felt obscurely guilty for having had nothing to do with Franco's death. He edged into the stairwell and tried the back door, and it was open.

He found himself in the kitchen. There were plastic glasses and liquor bottles on the kitchen table, and people he did not know standing around with drinks in their hands. Mick recognized a young professor with tenure in the English Department at Columbia. The professor had an Arab name that Mick could not remember. He was wearing a cable-stitch sweater and a polished look of boredom. He was standing with his back to the sideboard and smoking some kind of high-tech pipe. The shaft of it was all metal, as polished as his expression. It was hanging out of his mouth like a prosthetic tongue at half mast. A girl in a tee-shirt was standing next to him, straining to follow his conversation. She seemed dutifully impressed by him.

"It's important for us to have things beyond our *ken,*" the professor was saying. "We orphans of the void have a need to believe in order. Never mind that we find none in our lives, no grand design, no schema: we need it so it must be there. It's just that we are not equipped to *perceive* it, that's all. Keep the door closed and you can always convince yourself there's something behind it."

The girl in the tee-shirt took a sip of her drink. She was playing for time.

"You know what I really like," she said at last. "Most people think they're a drag but I really like them is horror movies."

"Horror movies." The young professor sucked on his pipe and nodded as if she had said exactly the right thing. "They posit a very palpable

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grand design. We may not be able to perceive the perimeters of the design, but it's certainly *there,* it's being manifested, a power greater than ourselves is hard at work. It's really very comforting. Suspense without Angst. Horror without terror."

Mick suddenly found a pair of hands over his eyes and he felt a woman's breasts press into his back. A voice said "Guess who," and when he turned he saw it was Heimlich's wife.

"Come on," she said. "You'd know those tits anywhere."

"Whose tits these are I think I know," Mick said. "A loaf of bread, a jug of thine and wow."

Heimlich's wife dropped him a curtsey.

"The *Mal*ster," she said, "is out picking up some more cheap wine."

"What did he do, take up a collection?"

"Not quite. He cleaned out my purse, the asshole." She took possession of Mick's arm. "Come on," she said. "It's party time."

She drew him into the living room. It was full of people. They were mostly people who worked for the magazine and people who used to work for the magazine and people who wanted to work for the magazine. All of them were standing in groups and all of them looked as if they belonged there. Mick felt a small bubble of uneasiness detach itself somewhere inside him. He put a lid on it. None of it really mattered. None of it could touch him. He was, he decided, immune to all of it.

They squeezed their way past Gettys the Art Director and fat Tony DeKoven, who had left the magazine to write for Hollywood and had just been dropped from a Steve Martin picture.

"The only thing I learned in L.A.," DeKoven was saying, "was how to be a lousy lay."

Heimlich's wife tightened her grip on Mick's arm and they kept moving. A burst of laughter ripped across the room from a group near the window. Mick flinched at the sound.

"You really hate this, don't you," Heimlich's wife said. "Why don't you just come over for dinner some night for God's sake."

"Your husband does something unpleasant to my appetite."

"Nobody said we had to invite him, did I."

A new 45 dropped onto the stereo. The music was turned down low. This was a crowd that liked to hear itself talk. Heimlich's wife did not bother to ask him if he wanted to dance, she just put her arms around him and waited. Mick knew he was trapped. He had to dance with her. If he did not dance with her then what he was doing was hugging her close in the middle of the room.

"Relax," she commanded him.

He moved her stiffly around the floor. His back was beginning to

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bother him. Heimlich's wife had her head on his chest and her hands were moving slowly up and down the back of his shirt and Elton John was singing goodbye to the Yellow Brick Road and Michael Kinsella who had left the magazine to write for Saturday Night Live was saying something in a loud voice about Franco.

" . . . every time you turned on the news," Kinsella was saying. "The whole time he was dying. *Generalisimo Francisco Franco is still alive.* So now we're gonna have Chevy go on Weekend Update and he picks up a bulletin and he says *Generalisimo Francisco Franco is still dead.*"

Mick found himself laughing.

Heimlich's wife lifted her head off his chest, saying "What."

"Funny," he told her.

The immunity was working. He was suffused with the triumphant thing his immunity had become. He felt the power swelling up in him and his whole body relaxed to make room for it. He melted effortlessly against Heimlich's wife. Nothing could really touch him now. He would walk among the afflicted, embrace their rotting flesh, drink of their sacred and polluted rivers, kiss their lepers, heal their hypochondriacs. They would take him for a great saint. He would fool them all. None of it could touch him.

When the music stopped, Tony DeKoven was explaining the difference between New York and Los Angeles. "In New York," he said, "they'll stab you with a knife to get your money. In L.A. they'll stab you with a fork because God told them to."

Heimlich's wife put her hand on Mick's chest as if to reserve it and turned to put on a cut from an old Stones album and that was when he saw Adriana.

She was standing across the room with a group of men, and she was watching him. She was drunk, he could tell from her smile. She was drunk and she was watching him with a big mindless smile on her face. Mick stared back at her. He gave his blood time to react. It did not jump, though. The immunity was still working in him.

Heimlich's wife caught him staring, and she followed his eyes just in time to see Adriana pull the hem of her skirt up to her waist and then drop it back down. She was wearing nothing underneath the skirt.

"I think she's trying to tell you something," Heimlich's wife said. "Wait. Let me guess. Were you supposed to bring her panties with you?"

Adriana began walking toward them and Jagger was mocking from the stereo, the victim turned tormentor picking at his scabs, *you know where you're goin' but I don't like the places you been,* and then Adriana was standing in front of him with her head cocked to one side as if waiting to make sure he remembered her name and Mick looked quickly at Heimlich's wife, but she only smiled and shook her head and looked away.

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"Don't I get a kiss," Adriana wanted to know.

"Yeah," Mick said, "sure."

Her lips swam up and surrounded his. Mick kept his mouth closed. She would not take the hint, though, and she pried with her tongue at his lips until at last he gave in, the point was not worth making, and she ran her tongue over his teeth and gums and poked with it behind his lips. Mick kept his eyes open. Heimlich's wife was standing there with her arms folded across her chest, watching the whole thing.

Adriana drew back finally and squinted up at him as if inspecting her work. Then she turned to Heimlich's wife.

"*Men*," she said. "All they want is just one thing."

"Right," Heimlich's wife said. "And then they want to fuck."

The two women stared at each other, one refusing to be embarrassed, the other refusing to be shocked.

"You like my shoes?" Adriana said finally. All three of them looked down at her shoes. They were glossy black Forties-style fuck-me shoes. "I gottem at a thriff shop," she said. "I painted'm myself. I got this terrific shoe paint stuff you can paint your shoes with."

"Ginchy," said Heimlich's wife.

"It's terrific stuff," Adriana told her. "If you like it I can get you some."

Heimlich's wife smiled and said nothing.

"Listen," Adriana said. "You ever been to Italy?"

"Twice."

"You know where Reggio is?"

"It wasn't my turn to watch it," said Heimlich's wife.

"I went there two years ago with this friend of mine I know named Cynthia."

Adriana's lips were slick with saliva, and it was beginning to drip down her chin. Mick fought back the urge to wipe it off. He reminded himself that this was not his problem any more. None of it mattered. Nothing could touch him.

"We were hitch-hiking all over Italy," Adriana said. "And we got a ride with these two guys and they took us as far as I think it was Sorrento. They were Italian. This one guy kept pinching my nipples. You ever had anybody pinch your nipples? He kept pinching my nipples like this, hard." She seized one of her own nipples and squeezed it through her blouse. "I don't know whether he thought he was trying to turn me on or what," she said. "I was having my period too, and they were really sensitive. I really like hated this guy, all right? And then there wasn't anything I could like *do* about it either because Cynthia was in back giving this other guy H-E-A-D in the back seat." She hunched up her shoulders and giggled. "Anyway, we got to this hotel and we took these separate rooms and every-

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thing, but Cynthia ends up in this one room with this other guy and I end up in this room with The Pincher."

Heimlich's wife shot Mick a look that said *oh really?*

"*Listen*," Adriana insisted. "So all's this guy wanted to do was fuck. And all's I wanted to do was I wanted to sleep. I mean I really hated this guy, you know? He smelled like a you know like a barber shop. So what I did finally was I let him fuck me."

"Well sure," Heimlich's wife said. "That sounds logical."

"See the thing is I was having my period." Adriana's eyes were open wide and reflecting the light from the ceiling fixture. "So when he gets finished there's blood all over the sheets and I stick my head in the pillow and make out like I'm crying and he asks me real impatient like what I'm crying about and I tell him I'm a virgin and my father's gonna kill me." She hunched up her shoulders again and let out a laugh that had no sound to it. "This guy took one look at the blood and went *out* of his tiny *mind*," she said. "You never seen anybody so guilty. He started apologizing about twelve thousand times and he sits on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands like this and he starts talking to himself in Italian and apologizing all over the place and hitting himself on the head and asking me to *marry* him and everything—it was great."

She reached behind her for Mick's hand and drew it around her waist.

"So the next day," she said, "they bought us this big breakfast and drove us all the way to Rome."

Heimlich's wife glanced past her at Mick, but this time he would not look at her.

"Well," said Heimlich's wife, "if you'll excuse me I have to go strangle another chicken for my guests."

She smiled and started to move away through the grudging press of people. Adriana leaned back against Mick and put her wet lips up to his ear.

"Dance with her," she said.

"I already danced with her."

"Dance with her again," Adriana told him. "Make her hot and then come back here to me."

Mick felt trapped. It was not the suggestion that bothered him, it was his own temptation. His body too was betraying him. The bad blood had broken down the immunity and it was swelling up in his groin. *But no*, he told himself. The immunity was still intact. This was no symptom, it was a hard-on was what it was and it did not bear thinking about.

"Come on," he said, "cut it out."

Adriana pulled away from him, and he knew he had said the wrong thing. There was no right thing, though, not any more. There was nothing

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he could do about it.

"I'm going to go pee," she said mournfully.

She did not move away, though. She stood there looking at him with her head tilted to one side.

"Have a nice pee," he said, bringing up the neutral tone.

She stood there looking at him with her blue transparent eyes wide open and impenetrable.

"Don't you want to come watch me," she said finally.

* * *

"Out out out!" Heimlich was shouting. "No diddling in the piss parlor! Everybody out on deck for shuffleboard! This means you, McCool!"

*He pounded on the bathroom door until Mick came out, Adriana following* him resentfully, and then he swept them into the living room, carrying himself with a ruthless swagger, the close-cropped beard preceding him like a prow, the jutting nose its figurehead. It was the swagger of a commander preparing to unleash germ warfare on his own troops. The guests fell back before him. Small fissures of anticipation broke into their faces. They gave way before him like disciples awaiting a dangerous miracle. Heimlich was going to squeeze blood from a stone again, and all of them wanted to see it, and none of them wanted to be the stone.

Mick tried to break away but Heimlich's fingers dug into his neck, keeping him close. The whole room was watching now. Heimlich turned to them and held up his hands for silence. The guests broke into derisive applause. Heimlich loved it. He put his hands on his hips and scowled at them to keep the applause going. The trick worked, and someone even began to whistle.

"You're a sick group," Heimlich said finally. "*But*," he added, "you are not sick *enough*. And I'm very disappointed in all of you."

There were moans from the guests.

"I appreciate the contrapuntal contrition." Heimlich lifted his head and stared down the blade of his nose. "But we are not interested in weeping here. We are likewise not interested in wailing and gnashing of teeth. Herman Melville was interested in whaling and gnashing of teeth. We are not. I'll tell you what we are interested in here. We are interested in something to offend everyone. That is what we are interested in."

There was a moment of silence, and then Adriana suddenly began to clap. There was a smile on her face like the fixed irrelevant smile on a marionette.

Heimlich ignored her.

"Something to offend everyone," he repeated. "But what do I find when I pick up a copy of last month's issue. You want to know what I

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find? Don't choke on the onion dip, DeKoven, it's a rhetorical question, I'll *tell* you what I find. I find 'Lieutenant Calley's Cookbook.' I find the Memoirs of Pat Nixon. I find 'The Secret Life of CIA Plants.' And I find that I have had enough of Nixon and Vietnam and Watergate. I don't pay you for your social conscience, I pay you to be funny. I pay you to offend *all* of the people *all* of the time. So why do you persist in attacking the same old enemies list over and over and over again. Have you no friends?"

Adriana was trying to slip her hand down the back of Mick's pants. He stepped away from her. He did not even look at her. He did not want to call attention to himself.

"*Nothing is sacred*," Heimlich intoned. "There will be no more exceptions. From now on I expect you to tread on the downtrodden. Strong-arm the weak. Insult the injured and injure the insulted. Violate the virtuous and needle the needy. Fuck the tired. Fuck the poor. *Shit on the huddled masses.* Am I making myself clear? I expect you to retch on the wretched of the earth. Give us blasphemy here! Give us betrayal of principle! Give us Barabbas! You've all been wallowing in the sacred cowshit, and I want *everybody out of the pool!*"

Mick looked away. His blood was trying to tell him something and he did not want to hear it.

"This is going to be our Sacred Cows issue." Heimlich began to walk among the guests like a seigneur touring his fiefdom. "So take up your cleavers and fight to the death. I want red meat on my table this month. Gettys, I want a cover with Mahatma Gandhi roasting a cow on a spit. Put a big smile on his face. Put a bloody loin-cloth on him. Put KISS THE COOK on the loin-cloth. Make it Elsie the Cow."

Mick looked around for Adriana. She was sitting on the couch next to Mel Ostrov, who wrote the Gilda Goodhead column. She caught Mick watching her and she smiled at him and dropped her head onto Ostrov's shoulder. Ostrov looked embarrassed.

" . . . something for you too, Ostrov," Heimlich was saying."Give me a medical report on how Negroes cause cancer in rats. Rothstein. The inside dope on the secret marriage of King Kong and his new wife, Coretta King Kong. You, Wild-And-Crazy-Breath, I've got a film review for you. A retrospective on the snuff films of Albert Schweitzer. What else. Ah, Wheeler. I've got another exposé for you, Wheeler. Muscular dystrophy is hereditary, and Jerry's Kids are *really Jerry's kids*. You got that? Mister McGuane, sir. A feature on incest between the Naz and his mommy. Call it 'Murmur of the Sacred Heart.' And something else. Right. You, Sussman. A script for a new situation comedy: *The Halfwits of Auschwitz*. In this episode Werner von Braun invents E-Z-Off Oven Cleaner, Anne Frank sucks off a pig, and Tevye the Dairyman steals Ilsa Koch's diaphragm and sells it to Shmedrick the

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Simpleton as a waterproof yamulke. Any questions?"

Sussman looked uncomfortable. He was a gaunt young man with thinning hair who always seemed to be in and out of the hospital with a liver complaint. "Anne Frank wasn't in Auschwitz," he said. "She was in Bergen-Belsen."

"That's not a question," Heimlich told him. "That's a point of information. Anyway, it's not important, we'll make it a guest appearance. Gettys," he said, swinging his hatchet face on the Art Director, "you've been after me for a centerfold. All right, you've got your centerfold. Give me that famous poster of Che Guevara. Put a lemon meringue pie in his face."

Heimlich swept Gettys aside with a gesture, and Mick knew his turn had come. He wanted to walk away, but his blood would not let him. It was a pool of nitroglycerine and he did not dare to jar it. The immunity was gone, swamped by a massive new infection. He could smell the infection on Heimlich's breath. *Infectious humor,* he told himself. He did not want to mess with it. He did not have the energy to fight his body.

"Swell party, isn't it," said Heimlich.

"I give it an eighty-five," Mick heard himself saying. "It's got a nice beat and you can dance to it." He was vamping, he knew. It was necessary to keep the rhythm going, but Heimlich was past giving points for rhythm. There was no way to avoid what was coming.

"What do you think of my centerfold," said Heimlich.

"Look," Mick said. "Leave me alone, okay?"

"What's this!" Heimlich clapped a splayed hand to his heart. He let it rest there like a huge pink spider clinging to his chest. "What have we here? Some left-over qualms from the Sixties perhaps? Can it be that you are offended by the notion of a pie in the face of the sacred Che? Has the Master Scourge of the celebrity set fallen on his knees before a graven image? Are all his conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils shrunk to this small measure? O if this be so, then the light has gone out in the temple of reason and all my songs are as ashes in my mouth! Bring down the curtain, *la commedia è finita!* But no! I cannot believe it. I *will* not believe it! The Master doth protest us. I mean to say the Master does but test us. We must not doubt him. He will wield his knout again as always. He will strip the hide of sanctity from every false messiah and lay bare the cringing philistine pulp beneath. For lo, even now he is about to furnish us proof most wondrous of his steadfast zeal."

"Guess again," Mick said.

He could feel the stares of the guests beating against his face like a swarm of restless moths. It gave him a throb of revulsion. He had to get away from it. He turned his back on Heimlich and walked toward the couch. He would collect Adriana and they would leave together. She

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would not want to go, but it did not matter. She would make a scene. That did not matter either. It was an ordinary party kind of scene she would make and he preferred it to Heimlich's rhetoric and the warning signs in his blood.

Heimlich was not giving up. "See!" he cried. "The Master turns his back! He calls our attention to his perfect indifference, not to mention the ink stain on the back pocket of his jeans. Let us call upon the Master to forgive us our doubts, for truly we are unworthy of his intercession on our behalf. Forgive us, Master! Make thy countenance once more to shine upon us. Stick around. Have a drink."

Mick held out his hand to Adriana. Her mouth began to twist up with resentment. Then she looked around the room and her expression changed. The stares of the guests were working on her like a drug. She seemed seduced by the moment. She took Mick's hand and rose up from the couch like a flame rising up from a candle.

Heimlich drew closer to them, blocking their escape. He was holding out some papers for Mick to see. They were pages of typescript spotty with notes and corrections in bright red ink.

"Stick around," he said. "Give us one last miracle before you go. One for the road. Turn one last round of wine to water. I have here in my hand the case against another false prophet in need of unfrocking. I call upon you to illustrate my argument."

Mick found himself holding the pages. He felt a moment's exaltation, as if he had somehow taken away a weapon from Heimlich. Holding on to the pages meant keeping them out of his face. Besides, it gave him something to do with his hands.

"Three hundred dollars," Heimlich said. "Cash on delivery."

"Uh huh." Mick held up the pages. "Who do I have to crucify for it."

Heimlich lifted an eyebrow. "Whom," he said.

Mick shook his head. He held the pages out to Heimlich, but Heimlich would not take them. The guests were losing interest in the game. They began to laugh and talk among themselves. Suddenly Adriana reached out and grabbed the pages. Mick made a move to take them back, but she twisted her body away from him. She wanted to read them aloud.

"*A Personal Appeal From Abbie Hoffman*," she read, holding the pages at arm's length. "*Help! I'm A Prisoner In A Castro Homo Camp!*"

She looked to the room for approval. Some of the guests smiled self-consciously. Most of them continued to talk to each other. Adriana's eyes began to go narrow with resentment.

Mick knew he could not afford to react at all. The important thing was to reveal nothing. It was necessary to ignore the sound of the bad blood rising up in protest. He put a lid on it. It was also necessary to look Heimlich

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in the face. That was necessary as well. He brought up his most impersonal tone.

"That isn't really very funny," he said.

Heimlich was not fooled. The carnivorous look was on him.

"Friend of yours?" he demanded.

"Not exactly."

"Oh no, not exactly," said Adriana. "He's being modest," she told Heimlich. *Modest* did not sound much like a virtue the way she said it. "He's always talking about Abbie Hoffman said this and Abbie Hoffman said that and how many weeks Abbie Hoffman's been underpaid. Not underpaid. Under*ground*. He put his picture up on his wall, that's *not exactly* for you. He's like the world's biggest Abbie Hoffman fan. They did all that taking over the buildings stuff together at Columbia. Abbie Hoffman is like his *main* man."

Mick was staring at her. He wondered if she knew what she was doing. He wondered if she even knew who Abbie Hoffman was. He had never heard her use the words *main man* before, that much he knew for certain.

"Just shut up," he murmured, "okay?"

"Well he is," she insisted. "You always thought he was real hot shit." She turned her party face to Heimlich. "The one he *really* likes is that weather lady," she said. "You know the one, whatsername, Bernadette Dohrn."

Heimlich turned a lamprey grin on Mick and waited.

"Bernadine," Mick said finally, not looking at Adriana, correcting her without enthusiasm.

"Whatever." Adriana gave a blithe shrug.

"Well," said Heimlich, "we can use that too. We can have her working a swing shift in a Cuban cathouse to support her Quaalude habit."

Mick knew he could not afford to lose his temper. The worst thing he could do was to let Heimlich know that it mattered to him. Then again, Heimlich already knew. Of course he knew. The whole thing was a set-up. *All right then*, Mick told himself. The important thing was not to admit it. The problem was that he was going to end up doing what Heimlich wanted no matter what, and both of them knew it.

"I'm really not interested in this," he said.

"Oh no," said Adriana. "You're not *in*terested. Well you oughta be interested. You better be interested. I can think of three hundred good reasons why you *should* be interested."

Heimlich stood there waiting, a smug look on his face, one hand stroking his chest like a huge pink spider massaging his heart. The beat of bad blood was loud in Mick's ears. The rhythm was unmistakably military. It did not matter what they told you on the news: the war was not over.

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**ROBERT GIROUX**

# On Bernard Malamud

"Working alone to create stories is not a bad way to live our loneliness," Bernard Malamud wrote not long before his death, in a characteristically modest statement which identifies a major theme of his writing. And as a result of his lonely work, readers have gained a body of short fiction unlike that of any other writer. Robert Alter called these stories "products of a unique imagination . . . Only Bernard Malamud could have written them." In his memoir "Long Work, Short Life," Malamud acknowledged: "My writing has drawn, out of a reluctant soul, a measure of astonishment at the nature of life." Between 1940 (when he began) and his death in 1986, he produced some of the most original and memorable stories of his era.

He started out in the early 1940s by publishing stories in non-commercial magazines—"meaning I didn't get paid for them but was happy to have them published"—until in 1949 *Harper's Bazaar* bought "The Cost of Living" and his professional career was launched. In 1952, I accepted his first novel, *The Natural*, and signed him to a two-book contract, intending that his second book would be a collection of stories.

When Harcourt, Brace turned down his new book, I blurted: "I can't believe they'd reject your stories!" and he said, "No, it's a novel, *The Assistant*. Would you like to read it?" It was excellent, and Farrar, Straus published the novel in 1957. The next year, FSG brought out *The Magic Barrel* (as his collection was called); it won the National Book Award. Thus began the splendid cavalcade of eight novels and four volumes of stories that constitute his *oeuvre*.

A fellow writer once called Malamud a "stern moralist." Moralist, of course, but stern was not his style. I came to admire the character of this gentle man more and more. As Bern's talent burgeoned, our personal relationship deepened into a close and abiding friendship. We shared many interests, especially a love of music and (with his wife, Ann) of opera. Bern and I were born not only in the same year but in the same month; in the Depression we had both worked our way through college in New York; and nothing was more important to each of us than the book. Once, as a

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Editor's Note: Adapted from the introduction to *The Complete Stories* by Bernard Malamud. Copyright © 1997 by Robert Giroux. To be published in September by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc. All rights reserved.

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birthday present, he gave me a rare item, Thomas Merton's translation of Guigo the Carthusian's "On the Solitary Life," in a limited edition from the press of his Bennington colleague Claude Fredericks. During Bern's presidency of the PEN American Center (1979-81), he arranged for the ceremony to take place on my birthday. (The citation bears his personal accent: "For distinctive and continuous service to international letters, to the dignity and freedom of writers, and to the free transmission of the printed word across the barriers of poverty, ignorance, censorship, and repression.")

There's a famous joke about a movie producer who was asked if he'd read *The Wings of the Dove* and answered, "Not personally." One memorable evening at Bennington College, when Governor Snelling presented Bern with the Vermont Arts Council Award, it was clear that *he* had read Malamud personally. The spirits of Bern's departed colleagues Shirley Jackson and Stanley Edgar Hyman permeated the proceedings, and the whole ceremony became a family affair.

Bernard Malamud was born in Brooklyn on April 26, 1914, the elder of the two sons of Bertha Fidelman and Max Malamud, immigrants from Russia. They had worked hard to establish a local late-night grocery store, a setting destined to become familiar in their son's writing. After changing locations over the years, they finally settled on McDonald Avenue, where the family lived in rooms over the store.

In 1929, when Bern was fifteen, his mother died and his father remarried. ("After the death of my mother, I had a stepmother and a thin family life," he revealed.) Eugene, his younger brother, was twice hospitalized for schizophrenia and died at age fifty-five. Bern went to school at PS 181 in Brooklyn, graduated in 1932 from Erasmus Hall high school, and entered City College in New York, where he received his B.A. in 1936. "I had hoped to write short stories after graduation from City College during the Depression," he explained, "but they were long in coming. I had ideas and felt I was on the verge of sustained work. But at that time I had no means of earning a living, and as the son of a poor man, a poor grocer, I could not stand the thought of living off him, a generous and self-denying person . . . I registered for a teacher's examination and afterwards worked a year at $4.50 a day as a teacher-in-training in a high school [Lafayette] in Brooklyn." He recorded how he felt when he took civil service exams for postal clerk and letter carrier: "This is mad, I thought, or I am. Yet I told myself the kind of work I might get didn't matter so long as I was working for time to write."

In the spring of 1940 he accepted a civil service job at the census bureau in Washington, D.C. "All morning I conscientiously checked estimates of drainage ditch statistics, as they appeared in various counties in the United

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States. Although the work hardly thrilled me, I worked diligently and was promoted after three months . . . After lunch I kept my head bent low while I was writing stories at my desk." It was a lonely rooming-house existence in the capital. That summer he wrote a non-fiction piece for *The Washington Post*, about the fall of France after the German Army was "obscenely jubilant in conquered Paris." He recalled, "I felt unhappy, as though mourning the death of a civilization I loved, yet somehow I managed to celebrate ongoing life and related acts. Though I was often lonely, I stayed in the rooming house night after night trying to invent stories I needn't be ashamed of." One such story, "Armistice," is about the fall of France as it affects an American grocer and his son.

Bern earned his master's degree in English literature at Columbia University in 1942, with a thesis on Thomas Hardy's poetry, and by 1945 his first stories had begun to appear in little magazines like *Assembly*, *Threshold, American Prefaces*, and *New Threshold*. In 1945 he married Ann de Chiara; their son, Paul, was born in 1947 and their daughter, Janna, in 1952. He received an offer in 1949 to teach at Oregon State College. A severe critic of his own work, he destroyed the manuscript of his first completed novel, *The Light Sleeper*, "one night in Oregon because I thought I could do better." His first book, then, was *The Natural*, a novel about the reality and fantasy of baseball, published in 1952. He dedicated it to his father, who died shortly thereafter. ("What does a writer need most? When I ask this question, I think of my father.") He wrote "The Magic Barrel" in a carrel in the basement of the college library; *Partisan Review* published it in 1954. In 1956-57, on sabbatical leave, he traveled in Europe and lived in Rome on a Rockefeller grant sponsored by *Partisan Review*, a period from which his stories with Italian settings are drawn. *The Assistant,* published in 1957, won the Rosenthal Award of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. *The Magic Barrel* was published in 1958, followed by six novels: *A New Life* (1961), *The Fixer* (1966), *The Tenants* (1971), *Dubin's Lives* (1979), *God's Grace* (1982), and the unfinished *The People* (1989), which appeared posthumously. The other collections of stories were *Idiots First* (1965); *Pictures of Fidelman* (1969), a book of related stories set in Italy, and *Rembrandt's Hat* (1975). In September 1961 he joined the faculty of Bennington College, where he taught for the rest of his life.

He won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for *The Fixer*. New York University honored him with the Elmer H. Bobst Award and the American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded him their prestigious Gold Medal for Fiction in 1985. (This is given only at five-year intervals, and it was presented by his friend Ralph Ellison.) In 1985 he received a major Italian award, the Mondello Prize, at an annual literary festival in Sicily. One night in March 1986, when the Malamuds were

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dinner guests of Roger and Dorothea Straus, Bern stated that he was four chapters from the end of his first draft of *The People* and believed it would be finished by the fall. The next afternoon, March 18, he died of a heart attack after working at his desk.

*The Complete Stories of Bernard Malamud* includes fifty-five stories starting in 1940 with "Armistice" and closing with the last two stories he wrote in the 1980s, while experimenting with new forms. (In his 1985 notes he calls them "fictive biographies" and "biographed stories." "In Kew Gardens," about Virginia Woolf, and "Alma Redeemed," about Alma Mahler, were both published in 1984; the odd biographical details of the lives of these famous women sound fantastic but are literally true—that is his point.)

The fifty-five stories are arranged as accurately as possible in the order of composition rather than publication. They reveal an astonishing development over forty years, from the realism of the grocery-store and Brooklyn background stories to the fantasy and freedom of stories like "The Jewbird," "Talking Horse," "Angel Levine," and "The Magic Barrel."

Only one story, "Suppose a Wedding," about the family of an unmarried daughter, is in dramatic form. As far as anyone knows, Bern made no other attempt to write a play, though he was always interested in the theater. He told me his uncle Charles Fidelman had been a prompter at the Yiddish Theater on Second Avenue and had toured with a repertory company in Buenos Aires. "Suppose a Wedding" was first published in 1965 in London in the *New Statesman*. (In 1996 it was set to music as an opera by Dr. Leonard Lehrman.) Another early story, "A Confession of Murder," was in fact written as the first chapter of a novel, *The Man Nobody Could Lift,* which he abandoned. Since it is a self-contained narrative with a surprise ending which he preserved, his executors decided to include it as an uncollected story. "Steady Customer," written in 1945, was recently discovered in *New Threshold.*

Flannery O'Connor, a great story writer herself (whose work Bern admired), quietly revealed what she thought of his genius in a letter to her friend "A" on June 14, 1958: "I have discovered a short-story writer who is better than any of them, including myself. Go to the library and get a book called *The Magic Barrel* by Bernard Malamud." Richard Gilman in his excellent *New Republic* memorial piece, "Malamud's Grace," called him "a story-teller in an era when most of our best writers have been suspicious of straightforward narrative. He was both [a realist and a fantasist]. I don't mean he alternated between reality and fantasy, but that at his best the line between the two was obliterated. Observation gave way to imagining." Gilman added that "a story like 'The Jewbird' (to my mind perhaps his finest), a piece that appears all whimsy and allegorical effort, is anchored in pebbly actuality." In her moving tribute to Malamud at the memorial

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service held for him at the 92nd Street Y, Cynthia Ozick remembered his reading of his story "The Silver Crown," which was "so electrifying that I wished with all my heart it was mine."

Both Gilman and Ozick rightly praised his highly individual stylistic gifts. Ozick mentioned the "heat of a Malamudian sentence." Gilman cited "the pleasures of the text, the little fates of language," giving these examples: "He drew on his cold embittered clothing" ("Idiots First"); "Life, despite their frantic yoohooings, had passed them by" ("The Magic Barrel"); "He pitied her, her daughter, the world. Who not?" ("The Girl of My Dreams"); "His heart, like a fragile pitcher, toppled from the shelf and bump bumped down the stairs, cracking at the bottom" ("The Death of Me"); "The window was open so the skinny bird flew in. Flappity-flap with its frazzled black wings. That's how it goes. It's open, you're in. Closed, you're out, and that's your fate" ("The Jewbird"); "Exaltation having gone where exaltation goes" ("The Last Mohican").

Ozick asked: "Is he an American Master? Of course. He not only wrote in the American language, he augmented it with fresh plasticity, he shaped our English into startling new configurations . . . He wrote about suffering Jews, about poor Jews, about grocers and fixers and birds and horses and angels in Harlem and matchmakers and salesmen and rabbis and landlords and tenants and egg candlers and writers and chimpanzees; he wrote about the plentitude and unity of the world."

At the memorial service Daniel Stern stated that Malamud "came as close to making a religion of art as is possible; a religion of suffering and comedy, taking the Jew as his starting point for what was most human in humankind. 'All men are Jews'—perhaps his most famous and most mysterious line."

In 1985, when he put together *The Stories of Bernard Malamud*, the last book published during his lifetime, I was honored that he dedicated it to me. His preface says, "Art celebrates life and gives us our measure." His art has given us his measure and it is great.

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**MILLICENT BELL**

# Fiction Chronicle

**After Rain. By William Trevor.** Viking. $22.95.
**The Collected Stories. By Mavis Gallant.** Random House. $45.00.
**Selected Stories. By Alice Munro.** Alfred A. Knopf. $30.00.

Short stories aren't novels—they're shorter. Short stories snatch at life and give us only a concentrated episode or several moments—or thin out an epic chronicle to the bareness of a Bible parable. The point in either case is that this quick read (done at a sitting, as Poe insisted) isn't just a crumb from a loaf; it's a round bagel with a mysterious hole of implication, a tale whose strength, as William Trevor says, "lies in what it leaves out just as much as what it puts in"—quite a different thing. Writing short stories is a high and special art, and only some novelists are good at it; most are not. Many great writers are better when they write briefly than when they don't. Faulkner, who wrote well either way, thought it was harder to write a good short story than a good novel. In a novel, he said, "you can be more careless; you can put more trash in it, and be excused for it. In a short story that's next to a poem, almost every word has got to be almost exactly right."

Just the same, we are likely to rank the accomplished short story writer under the novelist. We meet short stories in quickly thrown out magazines, while novels, though they used to appear in installments in monthlies or weeklies, now come to us directly in the presumably permanent form of expensive books. It may be years before a story is gathered up with others in a book. Meanwhile, a story seems less serious than a novel even when exhibited in that high chic showcase, the *New Yorker*—sandwiched between fact pieces and cartoons and hyperbolic ads for Versace clothes or Absolut vodka—reading for the odd moment, or to pass time in a dentist's waiting room, or on a plane. How often I have tried vainly to find again, in copies of the magazine still around the house, some jewel by William Trevor, Mavis Gallant or Alice Munro, all three of whom have appeared there regularly! This master and these two mistresses of short fiction have also reprinted their stories in periodic small collections—some of these already out of print—but only in a late gesture have decided to wrap up a parcel the size of a big novel—Gallant and Munro just now, Trevor four years ago (*The Collected Stories*, Viking, 1992, 1,261 pages). Trevor and Gallant are

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both in their seventies, and there is a finality implied by their "collected." But Gallant's title is disingenuous; her chosen fifty-two are about half of her stories already in print. Trevor's eighty-seven stories written over thirty years seemed a more final gesture, but as long as this compulsive writer lives his record is under revision, and a supplementary dozen are now presented. Munro, at sixty-six, is only a little younger, and her stories, too, have been massing behind her for as long as Trevor's and Gallant's; her "selected" admits the existence of at least as many again elsewhere, and more still to be written.

Perhaps, says Gallant, stories shouldn't really come at a reader all at once. She calls her own heavy book an object "fit to press cucumbers," and warns, "[s]tories are not chapters of novels. They should not be read one after another as if they were meant to follow along. Read one. Shut the book. Read something else. Come back later. Stories can wait." So they can—though dips and departures make it possible, in the end, to see how the writer has defined herself, sometimes successfully and sometimes less so. Trevor's big book contained no such warning. But dipping in and going away and coming back to read one and then another of the stories in it provided the opportunity of discrimination. Some were among the best ever written, some trivial exercises. Looking back at his comprehensive volume puts the new stories—a few unimpressive, a few very good, and one a masterpiece—into the frame of his decided achievement. By this process you can come to think of him, as of Gallant and Munro, the way you think of Chekhov, Maupassant, James, Lawrence, Joyce, Hemingway, or whomever you put on your list of the greatest.

Despite the compact intensity of a Trevor story, the power of his best writing has always sprung from a realist attentiveness which makes visible things seem caught on high resolution film—the way a character looks, the precisely observed scene—a novelist's gift. But plenitude of detail can be, in novels, just that pile-up Faulkner called "trash." Realism works differently in a Trevor story. "A Choice of Butchers," which relates the way a small boy, a butcher's son, comes to want someone else for his father, begins with a paragraph describing the staircase in the narrator's remembered home—the oatmeal colored wallpaper; the stairs, uncarpeted where they led to the room of the maid, Bridget, carpeted below; the mats outside the bedroom doors; the hall with its hallstand, potted plant and figure of the Virgin and framed picture of cattle; and other items that summarize in a symbolic way the orderly propriety of a tradesman's family life. And then, the paragraph ends with a sentence that makes hallucinatory total recall explicable: "It was against a background of the oatmeal shade and the oxen in the dawn that I, through the rails of the banisters on the upper landing, saw my father kissing Bridget at the end of one summer holiday."

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A visionary hyperawareness justified by a symbolic intent and psychological probability is part of Trevor's art.

But his use of description is only one of his means of structuring meaning. In his richest stories, those dealing with Irish life, his narrative is a poetic interweaving of sensation and memory, present and past, personal and public time. In "The Distant Past," fifty years separate 1968 from the day when the Protestant Middletons, brother and sister, had been locked into an upstairs room of their George II house outside Munster while men waited downstairs to murder British soldiers. Quaint and eccentric and poor, their sterile sibling union somehow representing the decay of their kind, they became, as the years passed thereafter, relics at whom the town smiled when they rode in their Ford Anglia displaying the Union Jack on Elizabeth II's Coronation Day. But everything changed. "Had they driven with a Union Jack now they might, astoundingly, have been shot." In "Beyond the Pale," four English visitors to the Antrim coast encounter a contemporary tragedy, the suicide of a fellow guest—someone Irish and "beyond the pale"—at a tourist hotel catering to others like themselves. Only Cynthia had spoken to the stranger and learned his story; the dead young man had killed his sweetheart after she became a terrorist. But neither her companions nor the English hotel owner want to hear what Cynthia knows. She alone responds sympathetically not only to this death but to the immemorial struggles which mark the region for an Irish consciousness. But this is not all. Cynthia, herself a victim of tyranny and hypocrisy, suddenly is empowered to speak truth by this experience—the truth not of public but of personal history. She reveals that she knows that her husband is the lover of the other woman in their party. It is this other Englishwoman whom Trevor chooses as his narrator, so making us unwillingly participate in her killing hatred for Cynthia as though private character provides an analog for politics. And in still another Irish story, "Attracta," past and present, the anguish of history and individual experience, are mingled again. When she was eleven someone told a Protestant girl the true story of her parents' death, how they had been killed by mistake in an ambush meant for the Black and Tans. She understands, then, why a mill owner and his Catholic mistress have always been kind to her. They had put down the booby traps. Now a spinster school mistress, she reads in the newspaper about a woman whose soldier husband was murdered in northern Ireland and his head mailed home in a biscuit tin, how this woman then went to Belfast to join the peace movement, and how she committed suicide after being raped by her husband's murderers. The teacher tries to tell her class that despite such horrors reconciliation and peace are possible. Her parents' killers had repented and changed.

Trevor has denied that he has any particular message to give, and, unlike the three just summarized, many of his stories seem to make little

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reference to historical issues. He says that he doesn't want to impose on his characters anything more than the predicament they find themselves in. But an enlightenment rarely given a name sometimes issues from some scrap of ordinary life. The title story of his newest collection is, actually, one of its failures, I think, partly because it departs from this reticence to suggest by reference to a Renaissance painting of the Annunciation (such a painting is even reproduced on the jacket) that sudden insight into her life has been granted to a modern young woman who goes to Italy after her lover has broken with her. Traveling alone, she stops at a *pensione* where she came as a child with her parents before they divorced. In the local church she contemplates its famous painting, moved by the strange luminousness in its atmosphere, something like the light that fills the street when she comes out after there has been a downpour. At once, she *knows*: disappointed in her childhood, she had "asked too much of love." It is an illumination hardly analogous to the Virgin's, though Trevor seems to want us to regard it so. Generally, however, his epiphanies, like those in Joyce's *Dubliners*, emerge more modestly from his characters' conditions, from their own limited vision which takes in what it can and no more. In another of these recent stories, "A Bit of Business," he relates the endeavors of a pair of Dublin punks on the day when the city is concentrated on the Pope's visit. While thousands are outdoors to watch the pontiff performing Mass, they break into apartments, cash in their loot and spend the evening with a pair of floozie pickups. But their success is flawed. One of the burgled apartments had not been vacant, after all. They had surprised an elderly man watching the telly, had tied him to a chair and fled—and know they can be identified. Of course, they should have killed him. As they walk in the city crowds, hearing the talk about the great day, they wonder "if the urge to kill was something you acquired."

Between the putative miracle of "After Rain" and such meager self-discovery lie most of the revelations in Trevor's latest stories. Two women who have been close since childhood find their friendship over after one has promoted the other's adultery ("A Friendship"). A husband and wife whose homosexual son fails to show up for his annual visit on his birthday realize that they have always cared more for each other than for this child who has failed them, and, since they feel little pain, they deserve to be hated ("Timothy's Birthday"). A widow finds that a reunion with her recently bereaved sister cannot come about because the sister has chosen to pay a debt fraudulently charged to her dead husband ("Widows"). Having long cherished a charming but feckless friend as tonic diversion of their own staid lives, a couple must accept that their daughter has fallen in love with him ("Damian"). The children of two pairs of divorcing and remarrying adults find themselves briefly together and build a private

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dream-world, play-acting at being their elders. Torn apart by new adult combinations, they realize that "the easy companionship that had allowed them to sip cocktails and sign the register of the Hotel Grand Splendide had been theirs by chance, a gift thrown out from other people's circumstances. Helplessness was their natural state" ("Child's Play").

Most of these stories represent the side of Trevor which, in the past, has produced many deft vignettes of modern life with an English locale or English characters; and, if employing Irish material, giving that choice no special significance. After all, he has lived most of his long life in England. But the strongest of them have a more essential origin in his ineradicable Irishness and especially that "lace curtain" Protestant Ireland into which he was born. This was not the seignorial world of lingering wealth and authority which Elizabeth Bowen knew, but that of the Protestant remnant on hard-worked farms and in the poor, small towns of the south where life for Catholics and Protestants alike is straitened. In Trevor's stories of this kind, the helplessness of women—and sometimes of children—repeatedly illustrates the restrictedness of human options. In the new collection, Ellie, who will bear the child of a priest she has loved, is made to marry the gross older man who, for taking her, will inherit her uncle's farm ("The Potato Dealer"). "Lost Ground," the prize of this new lot, makes a child's consciousness the center of a fable of modern Ireland.

In this story, too, religion, in its ambiguous mingling with politics, is a source of insight and not merely an ironic backdrop, like the Pope's Dublin visit in "A Bit of Business." No apparition could be more ordinary—more unlike the Annunciation angel in "After Rain"—than the woman observed by a Protestant farmer's son in his father's orchard one day in 1989. Milton Lesson thinks she has been stealing apples, but she kisses him and tells him that she is Santa Rosa and that he must not be afraid. What he must not fear, it devolves, is his mission to preach forgiveness and the end of bloodshed. He has never heard of Santa Rosa, and the local Catholic priest, to whom he goes for information, is chiefly annoyed that she has appeared to a Protestant instead of to a Catholic boy. That summer, as always, his family had participated in the annual celebration of "King William's victory over the Papist James in 1690"—a march of local Protestants down the silent, shuttered main street of the little Catholic town. When he begins his preaching in the neighborhood, Milton is hauled home by his horrified family and kept locked up, and is finally killed by his own elder brother and a fellow terrorist from Belfast. Trevor makes this happen in the most matter-of-fact fashion while depicting the not-at-all monstrous family forced to come to terms with Milton and to participate in his murder—his righteous but bigoted father, his mother and his sister and her husband, the local Protestant minister, as well as that elder

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brother who belongs to a "paramilitary" band vowed to vengeance against Catholics. A terrifying story told in Trevor's supreme way.

Mavis Gallant, like Trevor, has always denied that she has any special motive for telling her tales—any big obsessive subject—and her stories, like his, are, above all, marvels of particular observation and eschew overt "themes." She has said that she never sees her work as "something with a pattern. Something interests me or it doesn't. It's as simple as that." Like Trevor, she belongs, in her origins, to a Protestant minority in a dominantly Catholic culture—Montreal French in her case—which may account for an outsider quality in her view of others, as it may in his. Like Trevor, too, she may have increased this detachment by choosing at an early moment to live among foreigners. Trevor moved to England when he was thirty, even before he began to write fiction. Gallant's start as a writer coincided with her decision, when she was twenty-eight, to live permanently in Paris. She sometimes seems an uninvolved, sardonically amused observer of the oddities of others—these others, moreover, frequently themselves déraciné European residents, whether voluntary émigrés from England or North America or grotesque survivors of the tragic displacements of fascism and war. Yet it is not just human absurdity that interests her. As with Trevor, the disasters of History pulse beneath the cool skin of her prose. Despite their concentration on small episodes in the lives of unremarkable persons, both writers seem to maintain, in the back of their minds, a sense of the giant convulsions of modern times. For Trevor this is modern Irish history. For Gallant it is Europe from the thirties to the present, with Nazism as a source of ultimate meaning.

Gallant's idea that she has been a historian is reflected in the fact that she chooses to arrange the fifty-two stories in her "collected" not in the order in which they were written but in the order of the decades they depict—the thirties to the nineties. The first two are Riviera stories that evoke the beginnings of World War II. One might, if one were reading "The Moslem Wife" superficially, see it as a comic story about the inheritor of a posh Riviera hotel and her complaisant, "moslem" marriage to a charming, useless cousin who was too "pally" with female guests. The only thing that counts, to Netta, is the hotel's meticulous upkeep, the yearly polishing and painting, the changing of the awnings, the maintenance of the grounds. Even Jack's desertion seems unimportant. The story runs thirty pages or so and is almost all—very amusingly—about Netta and Jack and the hotel guests who include Jack's hypochondriacal mother. But one March the hotel empties out and Jack goes off for a holiday in America from which he will not return promptly. Netta, whose father had once told her that there would never be another man-made catastrophe after the first world war and the Bolsheviks, is proved wrong, though she "had her workmen come in, as usual." Five

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years later she is still there among the squalid ruins. The Italian Army had first taken over and worked over the hotel, and it was followed by the Germans and certain French. Jack did not reappear till the war ended but his mother stayed on to welcome the non-paying guests. Netta wrote Jack, "When the Italians were here your mother was their mother, but I was not their Moslem wife." History has not, after all, been altogether off-stage.

"The Four Seasons" is about Mussolini and the English, although it is also about a young Italian servant girl who spends a year working for the Unwins on the Ligurian coast. Her employers are upper-class but penurious; they share a thin cutlet or the vegetable remains of a stew as a family meal and their two children are so weak with rickets that Carmela develops a bend in her spine from carrying them about. To the Unwins and their friends the serving-girl remains an invisibility though she catches the kindly attention of the new clergyman who wants to fix the church clock and is advised "none of us has ever missed a train," and she is glanced at sympathetically by Dr. Chaffee who gives her anemia pills she treasures as keepsakes. But she never understands the Signora's neurotic phobias and mix of suspicion and an insincere benevolence which does not prevent her from neglecting to pay Carmela's wages. Although a picture of Mussolini had hung in her village classroom Carmela does not take notice, as we do, that the Unwins are admirers of the new Fascist state. When her little brother shows up one day at the kitchen door Mr. Unwin says, "Why do you beg? No one needs to beg in modern Italy." Carmela's last glimpse of Dr. Chaffee is on a line of Jewish deportees. He gives her a vague wave of farewell—or benediction.

In each of Gallant's successive decade-groupings stories that seem to be simply episodes of mundane life are lit from beneath by history. One of the most elaborate stories of the fifties is "The Remission" which relates how Alec Webb came down to the Riviera to die and died too slowly, so that his family changed while he did so. As Alec faded, his wife took on more brilliant color, and, finally, a lover, and his children, growing imperceptibly older, accommodated to their mother's defection. Only Alec's friends, the resident eccentrics and snobs of the English colony, seemed stuck changelessly in time. Alec's replacement by Barbara's lover, a movie bit player, is historical. "If he sounded like a man in a British joke, it was probably because he had said so many British-sounding lines in films set on the Riviera. Eric Wilkinson was the chap with the strong blue eyes and ginger mustache, never younger than thirty-four, who flashed on for a second, just long enough to show there was an Englishman in the room." Dying at last, this type of the English gentleman has become a movie formula.

As for many, the sixties were a watershed for Gallant. In Paris during the tumultuous days of *soixante-huit* she kept a remarkable notebook

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(published in 1986) which recorded her responses to the confused impressions of those days. There was, after that, no question of her interest in politics. Gallant has told an interviewer that she finds it "hilarious" to read in some of the criticism of her writing that she is not interested in politics. "I'm extremely interested in politics. My writing is permeated with politics. I read I don't know how many newspapers a day," she protests. Many of her best stories have been concerned with those refugees from Nazism who became a permanent part of the Paris scene. She would continue to write now and then about the French whom she had come to know so well— a story such as "Luc and His Father" which describes the dilemmas of a top civil servant in his relation to his son who simply can't pass examinations, or such stories of the arts scene as "Speck's Idea," which describes a dealer's attempt to make his fortune by promoting a forgotten Fascist painter, or the "Henri Grippes" series about the connivings and strivings of a third-rate *homme de lettres*. But a stronger source of interest for Gallant is the culture of expatriation as she has witnessed it among Paris's population of refugees. These are hardly sentimentally regarded; they can be ridiculous, contemptible, self-serving rather than noble—as apt illustrations of the comedy of human self-deception and pretense as anyone else. Amalia and her husband, in "Questions and Answers," are Romanians "notoriously . . . marked by delusions of eminence and persecution." They are wrung by anxiety and envy because of a more recent arrival from whom they had once borrowed. Unaccountably, despite her imprudent lingering on in Bucharest, despite her bad lungs and her swollen legs, Marie has been lucky; she has a passport and hopes to emigrate to America. Amalia cannot bear the way Marie talks to strangers, finds work and spends her earnings on flowers and strawberries for her friends, wishes like a child on the new moon, gets a "red card" permitting her to stay in France for another year—and, above all, never asks for what is owed her. "Amalia thinks they might forgive Marie if she insulted them"—or if she allowed them to pity her. "Every situation has an element of farce," Gallant has said, shrugging off an interviewer's question as to whether she considers herself a tragic writer.

About the inexpressible horrors behind displacement, the refugees' memories, Gallant has never presumed to write. Her abiding curiosity lies elsewhere. She has related how, as a twenty-two year old reporter for a Canadian newspaper she first saw American Army photographs of the liberated Nazi concentration camps. She felt that it would not be the survivors whose tales one most needed to understand. They "would probably not be able to tell us anything, except for the description of life at point zero. If we wanted to find out how and why this happened it was the Germans we had to question. What had happened to the people who

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produced Bach and Goethe, who had been singing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" since the Renaissance?" It was not until the early sixties, however, that she journeyed to Germany to find, as she has declared, "the origin of the worm—the worm that had destroyed the structure." The result was a group of stories about Germans including the novella-length "Pegnitz Junction." She called the collection of these published in 1973, "not a book about Fascism, but a book about where Fascism came from . . . the historical causes of Fascism—just its small possibilities in people."

"Ernst in Civilian Clothes" concerns a generation practiced in forgetting. It is the twentieth anniversary of Stalingrad, and Ernst—now either thirty-four or thirty-six (his identity papers are not genuine)—finds that the television recap makes the battle seem "a defeat all around, and a man with dull memory . . . can easily think that France and Germany fought on the same side . . . or else there were two separate wars, one real and one remembered." In 1945, he had joined the Foreign Legion "because the food was better on their side of the prison camp" and eighteen years later, after Indochina and other places, he prepares to return to Germany. Only eleven pages long, the story is a complex web of Ernst's wandering, uncertain recollections as he spends a last day in Paris in Willi's room and hears a neighbor he has been watching scold and beat her child who cries (for to whom else can he cry?), "Maman, Maman!" Ernst feels foreign to himself in his borrowed civilian clothes; he has been in uniform since he joined the Hitler Youth when he was eight. Except for the time when he had buried his papers and uniform outside a village he cannot remember the name of and struggled, feeding on bark and garbage, to the house where his stepfather was burning his own SS uniform in the cellar—and had not been let in. All of his life, as Gallant gives us scattered bits and pieces of it, feels like "an endless leave without the hope and the dread of return to the barracks."

"The Pegnitz Junction" is a pastiche of reality and dream vision, a surreal journey into the interior of postwar Germany, or, rather, into German consciousness. The journeyer is a girl from a rebuilt baroque town in seventies Germany whose literal adventure is quite unpolitical; she has gone to Paris for a holiday with her lover and his little son and now returns with them on a slow train. The experience has not been a success; Herbert has been preoccupied with little Bert, and Christine's relations with the child are difficult. It is not certain that she will not, after all, marry another man, to whom she has been engaged. The train trip is tedious and uncomfortable and is still unconcluded when the story stops. But the reader soon notices the complex layering of political and literary parody Gallant has applied to these events. Christine's voyage into the heart of darkness of her own country will remind the reader of Conrad or of Kafka (*The Castle* is

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directly parodied at one point). It also resonates with suggestions of the transport of the victims to the Nazi death camps. The countryside she passes looks scorched, the consequence, it is said, of a "holocaust," and the train is rerouted because of the threat of further fire. The conductor prohibits the windows from being opened; the toilets are locked. The train reaches a junction at a barbed wire frontier where Christine is separated from Herbert and forced to wait in a crowd of women dressed in uniform clothing and grouped by their foreign nationalities—Polish, French, Greek, Russian, Dutch—while a pregnant young German woman, also on her way home, pretends unsuccessfully, that she is an American. The German passengers—obnoxious schoolgirls, a middle aged woman who incessantly stuffs herself with food from a hamper, even Herbert, with his timorous respect for rule and order—are caricatures of national personality unmitigated by such specimens of "the new antiauthoritarian army" as "Dietchen Klingebiel, who later became a failed priest; Ferdinandchen Mickefett, who was to open the first chic drugstore at Wuppertal; Peter Sutitt, arrested for doping racehorses in Ireland; and Fritz Foster, who was sent to Africa to count giraffes for the United Nations and became a mercenary." Gallant's narrative—dislocated, fragmented and pieced as though by scissors and paste—is a postmodern assembly which juxtaposes, like a crazy quilt, Christine's present and past and, even more radically, makes use of the thought-stream of others. By some sort of New Age transmission she seems to hear the silent thoughts of the lady with the hamper—her story of forty-seven years in America, her unquenchable anti-Semitism (Germany could have won if a plan had been carried out to put Jews into German attics, the Allies would not have dropped their bombs. Roosevelt was really a Dutch Jew named Rosenfeldt). No one seems able to make sense of the unmentionable past which a tour leader on the train is heard to refer to as "the Adolph time . . . a sad time for art in this country." Narrative is mutilated or helpless. Even the story Christine tells little Bert about his bath sponge, which he calls Bruno, never concludes.

"The Pregnitz Junction" is, probably, the most ambitious—and the most problematic—story Gallant has written. William Pritchard believes that it is an extreme example of her refusal to make connections or come to conclusions. "This is the Palace of Art, and Mavis Gallant is perilously close to residing there in a novella which in the long run feels too clever, too oblique, too arty for its own moral and human good," he has observed. This almost persuades me except that Gallant's vision of disconnection and failed memory is itself a bitter, moral vision of a fractured world, a culture collapsed. Willi, in "Ernst in Civilian Clothes," is "waiting for the lucid, the wide-awake, and above all the rational person who will come out of the past and say with authority, 'this was true', and 'this was not.'"

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Trevor and Gallant provide some justification for the common inaccurate assumption that there is such a thing as a *New Yorker* style. Both writers exhibit what is sometimes thought to be the magazine's own personality—they are sophisticated ironists who regard life from a distance. Neither writes in a visibly autobiographical way. Although Trevor's depicted scenes are often those of the Ireland he remembers intensely, his private history seems hidden. Gallant has only lately produced a number of stories that employ a protagonist called Linnet Muir (a linnet, like a mavis, is a bird), who seems to reincarnate the writer's own youth in Canada, but these are a departure from her usual anonymity. Perhaps, for Trevor and Gallant, too, their stand-apart temperament is assisted by the fact that they both have lived far from the scenes of their youth for years. Very different is Alice Munro, whose stories have also been published chiefly in the *New Yorker*. Like Gallant, she also is a Canadian, but one who has never left home, and her stories very often have a personal reference. Most of those she selects as her best, now, employ her own most familiar realities not only of scene but of personal experience—the rural Ontario in which she grew up on a farm where her father raised silver foxes while her mother gradually lost a battle with Parkinson's disease, her first marriage to a fellow student at the University and her move with him to British Columbia, and her subsequent life after her divorce and remarriage. She lives even today in a town of three thousand west of Toronto, spending winters on Vancouver Island. But having said this, of course, one reminds oneself that even the most personal-seeming fiction may not be truly confessional. Nearly half of the stories in this latest grouping are narrated by an "I" whose experiences resemble the author's. But they are triumphs of the revision of memory by art.

However close or far from fact these fictions are, in any case, Munro, too, has the realist's faculty of *seeming* to be a witness who has remembered everything, the very look and sound—even the smell—of actuality. The immediacy of her writing is so powerful that the reader gasps and refrains from interpretation, for this, one says, is simply the way things *were*, and the usual sense-making of story-telling seems almost irrelevant. The remembering persona who narrates "Images" brings back to mind the nurse who attended her dying mother, not only how she looked and sounded, but how she smelled, "like metal and like some dark spice." The coming death is hardly mentioned. The image of the leave-taking mother recedes behind the screen of badinage between the child's father and the nurse, and the child's distracted awareness of illness and death yields to another experience when we hear how father and daughter went out at this time to empty the traps he has set for muskrats. The child is made to understand how the traps work, sees the dead, drowned animals, and the grown woman

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remembers, "I did not understand or care. I only wanted, but did not dare, to touch the stiff soaked body, a fact of death." Then, this experience is succeeded by another when they encounter a paranoid neighbor who comes at them waving an axe. Terror subsides, the madman is soothed and reassured, they visit him in his filthy shack before returning home, the child vowed to silence. "Like the children in fairy stories who have seen their parents make pacts with terrifying strangers, who have discovered that our fears are based on nothing but the truth, but who come back fresh from marvelous escapes and take up their knives and forks, with humility and good manners, prepared to live happily ever after—like them, dazed and powerful with secrets, I never said another word." Is this a story, some readers will ask? Yes indeed, and a powerful one, in which the fact of death is met and contained in a young mind.

A mother's image is a powerful presence in a number of Munro's best stories, persisting in memory as the representative of a view of life the daughter has rejected—a view based on literal religion, optimism, Victorian sentimentality. Yet the narrator is never sure that her own version of experience is a convincing replacement for these. "Friend of My Youth" is the story of a story twice removed, that of a friend her mother had made when she was a young school teacher in the Ottawa valley. She had boarded with two sisters, one of whom married the other's fiancée; the jilted girl continued to live and keep house for the couple until her sister died. When the man both of them loved then married his wife's nurse instead of his sister-in-law, the narrator's mother saw her friend as a saintly martyr to selflessness. But the narrator has her own ideas. She calls her mother's heroine a "Presbyterian witch" made evil by "turning away from sex." In "The Progress of Love," another—or perhaps the same—narrator ponders old family stories, like the one that her grandmother had wanted to hang herself to punish her husband for his infidelity. Standing on a chair with the noose around her neck she had sent her little girl—the narrator's mother—to fetch her husband. But, years later, another version of the events is offered by the narrator's aunt; the suicide attempt had been a fake, the rope had only been thrown, without being tied, over the beam. Yet the writer-narrator understands in her post-modernist way that truth and stories may be indistinguishable. She admits that she herself cannot resist fictionizing a family legend about *her* mother—how the grown and married woman who had been the child messenger in the first story burned the three thousand dollars that finally came to her as a legacy from her father. Imagining the scene, the story-teller pictures her own father standing by respectfully, supportively, as the bills were tossed one by one into the stove. It does not matter that he will later say he had known nothing about his wife's grand gesture. "It is hard for me to believe that I made that

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up. It seems so much the truth it is the truth," the Munro persona insists. She, the inheritor of others' memories, cannot resist challenging and changing them. For even her own memories become, through the story-telling process, subject to doubt. In "Miles City, Montana" we hear that, as a child, she heard about—though doubtfully saw—her father carrying the body of a drowned playmate. She describes exactly how the dead child looked, but still reminds herself, "I don't think I really saw all this. Perhaps I saw my father carrying him, and the other men following along, and the dogs, but I would not have been allowed to get close enough to see something like mud in his nostril."

The wise writer knows that explanation, like truth of fact, is elusive. "The Beggar Maid" describes the tensions and contrasts of class and of gender in a modern marriage between a Munro-like narrator and her first lover, a chronicle that could, if dilated, have made a novel about the difficulties of human union. But the shorter form preserves mystery. Why did Rose, after she has rejected the thought of marrying him, suddenly fling back and marry Patrick after all—and continue that alternation of repulsion and embrace for years afterwards? Did comradely compassion overcome her? Or a sudden fear that she could not manage without either his love or his promise to take care of her? Or vanity, the inability to resist such a test of power—which might be repeated again and again? Or, finally, a vision of happiness, that momentary surprise that occasionally gleams out without warning in the midst of ordinary lives led together from day to day? This richly imaginative writer makes more than one possibility plausible. And she can even make a more conventional, third-person narrative about a protagonist who does not resemble herself at all seem equally rife with contrary potentialities. In "Carried Away," the secret love of a small town librarian for a World War I soldier she knew only through letters seems to end with his gruesome beheading by a factory power saw. Years pass. She marries the factory owner, has children, grows old. But suppose, the writer seems to say, the story had been different. On a trip to another city her elderly heroine now meets a man who turns out to be her dead dream-lover. He, too, has married and had his own long life. "Love never dies" is given a literal form. Is it a dream, or has the previous version of things been a dream?

Again and again, Munro's narrative representative confesses her own unreadiness to interpret experience and suggests the roads not taken in a plot. But despite such modish self-reflexivity or indeterminacy in her writing the complexity of Munro's characters makes them seem more rather than less real—as in the vivid portraits of Rose and her stepmother Flo in the series to which "The Beggar Maid" belongs. Some of Munro's best stories represent a young girl's first perceptions of the meaning of

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adulthood, surely a favorite fiction situation but never shown more freshly. To see how this proves so, read "Walker Brothers Cowboy," the earliest story in this book, a tale of the Depression, of a child's ride through the scruffy countryside with her door-to-door salesman father, and their visit, almost by accident, at the house of one of his old girlfriends. Or "The Turkey Season." In this story a sort of Joycean epiphany comes to the fourteen-year-old who has worked for a few vacation weeks as a turkey gutter. Herb Abbott, the foreman, shows her how to take out the slippery entrails "quickly and buoyantly," and wins her regard, perhaps even her sexual interest, as he has already won the interest of the older women in the work crew. Then something happens which she hardly understands; a new worker, a swaggering, vulgar youngster befriended by Herb, is suddenly fired by the boss because he has behaved offensively to one of the women and perhaps revealed that he is homosexual. The young girl thinks suddenly as she watches Herb—was he ashamed that he had not stood up for Brian? She cannot be sure if she understands that the man who has aroused her youthful feelings is someone who loves men more than women. She only feels the attraction he exercises, the awakening he has effected by the impossible prospect of intimacy with him. These are stories of classic form. Yet even in these Munro suggests that there is something both alluring and baffling, something uncertain in life. As father and child ride along in "Walker Brothers Cowboy," they pass through "a landscape which has an enchantment in it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine."

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**JEAN-FRANÇOIS SIRINELLI**

# Between Valhalla and the Valley of Hell

We have no choice but to begin with a yellowed photograph, seventy-one years old: the entering class of 1924 at the *École normale supérieure* poses for posterity. In the front row, side by side, are two young men who have chosen the Department of Philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron. The former holds a pipe and a wide-brimmed hat, which lend his appearance a hint of the bohemian student. The latter, in contrast, sports a kerchief and gaiters. Already two distinct styles, and contrasting relationships to the institution they have just entered. At the same time, we must be careful not to succumb to the pitfall of the easy cliché, since these two *normaliens* obviously cannot be summarized by such a facile contrast.

So we shall set the photograph aside and make our starting point an oath that dates from the same period. On the Rue d'Ulm, Sartre and Aron made a playful pact that whichever of them outlived the other would write his obituary in the yearbook published for the Rue d'Ulm alumni. Decades passed, and when the first of them died in April of 1980, the other, in an otherwise affectionate and mournful article, wrote that "the deal is off." By his account, this decision was not so much the result of sensitivity or of offense received as it was an acknowledgement of the chasm that History had placed between the two men. Indeed, one must acknowledge that the generation of Sartre and Aron was dealt with rather harshly in its relations with the history of its times. What is more, the two best-known texts stemming from this age clearly imply the existence of this harshness in this generation's dealings with history. Paul Nizan's *Aden Arabie* and Robert Brasillach's *Notre avant-guerre* showed that the literary preparatory schools of the twenties did not exist in an insulated world—far from it. As described by Vara, they were the crucible of diverse life stories that were soon to become tragic: the Communist Nizan dies from a German bullet at the beginning of World War II; Brasillach, a follower of Maurras, seduced in time by ideologies from across the Rhine, falls to French fire at the end of the same conflict. It would surely be a distortion to make this generation's *normaliens* into

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proto-Communists or proto-Maurrasians: the political center of gravity, as we shall see, lay elsewhere. But at the same time it is accurate to speak of the tragic history of a generation which, born at the turn of the century, was immensely fortunate in being spared all but a couple of years of World War I. This history is anything but innocent: the perils brought by the thirties, then the ordeal of the War and the Occupation brought with them the first series of breakers that would cause the destinies of many schoolmates of Sartre and Aron to founder. In this crisis this generation came to prominence as the new guard of forty-somethings that take up the course begun by the Liberation and occupy center stage, with Sartre soon becoming its leader. Yet here again history soon moves on, as the East-West split and the subsequent wars of decolonization introduce a new line of cleavage. It is this second series of rifts that will eventually scuttle the Sartre-Aron friendship. Indeed, the two men then find themselves the intellectual figureheads of competing, newly-formed camps.

Hence the intellectual generation of 1905, of which Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron ultimately become the eponymous heroes, was divided by a series—indeed, an entire network—of fault lines that ultimately left little opportunity for friendship. As Aron notes in 1956 at the age of fifty, "the fact that no friendships in our generation could stand up to divergences in political opinion, and that friends, if they were not to part ways, had to undergo political changes together, is both understandable and sad."

This excursion into the notion of a generation was necessary for a justification of our choice of Sartre and Aron as subjects. Obviously, intellectual history is marked with many other duels, particularly during the Cold War; it is just that Sartre and Aron were exactly the same age, that they were friends and, even more importantly, emerged from the same intellectual mold. From that point on, the comparative history of their respective courses through the century is more than one of a shattered friendship; it is the reflection of the dominant ideological phases of twentieth-century France.

Certain precautions are called for in examining a subject as dense as this one. First, one must keep in mind that this period of history, chronologically close as it may be to our own, still belongs to another epoch, before the advent of the "videosphere," to use Régis Dubray's term. This was an age when intellectuals, through their debate, helped to clarify the stakes in the larger national debates. Furthermore, the enterprise of retrospective imagination requires all the more effort as a result of the dissolution of the grand global ideologies and the concomitant dislocation of the moral credit and influence once wielded by intellectuals.

This meant more than a mere rearrangement of the furniture. Sartre and Aron exchanged roles: while Sartre gradually came to take up a

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position behind the scenes, Aron found himself carried into the spotlight during his later years. Sartre, long regarded as an oracular figure, suddenly, in retrospect (and in the words of his adversaries) appeared as a sort of incongruous Pythia who had dispensed diagnosis and prognosis always out of season. This late role reversal gave way to a war of images now carried on by a new generation with a new identity—another factor making our study more difficult, but also one of its reasons for being.

Jean-Paul Sartre's destiny was indeed a singular one: after some thirty years of brilliant prominence (the "Sartre Years," from the Liberation to the middle of the 1970s), he was expeditiously relegated, as it were, to posthumous quarantine. Yet beyond this sort of ritual murder familiar in the intellectual community, for the last fifteen years or so the "Sartre Question" has arisen, as his passage from sun illuminating the ideological landscape to a (momentarily or permanently) faded star is the most tangible sign of changes in the intellectual constellation, of a shift in its points of reference—a veritable Copernican revolution at the center of the intellectual sphere. Another such sign, to be sure, is the late, then posthumous, glory of Raymond Aron, whose own fate was no less unusual.

This being the case, to confine oneself to analysis of this hall of mirrors would be extremely restrictive. The two men have independent existences of their own, including political roles that they contemplated and assumed. We might examine their respective meditations on the history of their times, and the ties that they created with their age through various forms of engagement. During his life, Aron explicitly formulated the essential nature of contact with history. There is an often-mentioned phrase in the epilogue of his *Memoirs*: "If someone were to take the trouble to read my works in the future, he would discover the analyses, aspirations, and doubts of a man impregnated with history." What is more, history also reverberates through his philosophical works. Upon remitting his rapier as a member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences on January 15, 1965, Raymond Aron described his stay "on the banks of the Rhine" at the beginning of the thirties: "During the course of my passionate reading of Hegel, Marx, and Max Weber, I conceived of the project that has remained my own: to think history as it comes into being (*penser l'histoire en train de se faire*)."

Sartre's relation to history is a more difficult subject from the very outset, since it takes its ground in a polemical environment. In the lovely phrase of Jacques Audiberti, Sartre was a "night watchman on every face of intelligence's rampart." The phrase can of course be used both by partisans and adversaries of the philosopher. The one group asserts the watchman's unfailing vigilance and the stern role he played in many battles. The others tend to stress that there is danger in delay when the lookout makes his

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rounds in a daydream, taking no notice of things as they are, or detached from this reality—or worse, when he is sleepwalking. In this view, Aron thought history while Sartre dreamt it. Such reproaches, made recently, are all the more powerful, since this man was, for decades, the quintessential French intellectual. When Leonid Pliouchth, for example, reproaches French scholars for their "self-hypnosis" regarding the Soviet Union, he adds this commentary to his criticism: "To my eyes, Sartre symbolizes this perversion of the mind, the rejection of reality and refuge-taking in a political dream; the mass of words in the face of reality and pretty speeches are no more than theater, since reality is masked." On the other hand, adds Pliouchth, "for myself, and for many dissidents, the thought of Camus is courageous, though tragic. Camus is truth; Sartre falsification."

Fifteen years after his death, the case of Sartre continues to exert a powerful presence, and analysis often swings between hagiography and polemic. In any case, this implicit debate in the matter of his relationship with history has no application to the years of his youth: whether a lucid and vigilant guardian in the face of oppression or an irresponsible somnambulist, the issue only comes up in the period where Sartre has already evolved into an intellectual *engagé*. This was preceeded by long years of profound civic inactivity. This prolonged political abstinence is itself a historical exhibit: the Young Sartre, or the Non-temptation of History.

The task of the historian is to attempt to exhume the scraps of the past and make sense of them without, in doing so, holding his hat in his hand, or venting invective from his lips. In the same way that Marc Bloch entreated scholars of the French Revolution with a vigorous "Robespierrists, Anti-Robespierrists, we cry 'Mercy!' Tell us simply: who was Robespierre?" We may soberly ask the same question with regard to their political involvements, about Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron, without driving some to despair or inspiring others to rapture. The historian of great intellectuals may strive to work in good conscience without being immediately suspected of Pantheon-building or its opposite; this is, in fact, a further goal to be set for ourselves, inasmuch as a history of intellectuals is laden with ideological baggage. The historian who lowers his guard risks yielding his place to the moralist.

To execute a serene history—not to say a sterile one—is never an easy task, but especially not when one is working on Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron in an era when their aura remains powerful, and where one or the other of them continues to embody the posthumous quintessence of one of two opposing camps in the recent history of intellectuals. This is because the chronological proximity of the object presents the problem of sympathy, particularly for the historian. This last element, in the etymologically strict sense of the word, cannot be dispensed with,

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constituting in any event the very essence of the historian's métier. And there is always common sense. Too much time spent with the same figures over the course of many years means one becomes infected—for the historian, this is indeed a disease—by sympathies, and, even more serious though less common, by antipathies. Rather than deny the existence of such a risk, the historian's task involves accepting it and trying to attenuate its effects.

But any judgement is necessarily a product of the ideological climate of the times. The ostracism long endured by Raymond Aron at the hands of a large sector of the intellectual world is every bit as excessive as the absolute condemnation often suffered these days by Sartre. But merely to acknowledge this is not to fall into a kind of mitigating ecumenism: greatly influential intellectuals like Sartre and Aron bear responsibility to the degree that the positions they take in public influence the opinions, or even the actions, of their fellow citizens. It is not the historian's task (or expertise) to call them to account. But under what banner could he possibly confer on the intellectual *engagé* a status of extraterritoriality in the face of historical research? The intellectual *engagé*, being an actor in History, is subject not to its tribunals (which do not exist) but to reasoned analysis, whenever possible, of the consequences of his writings and actions.

There are after all two poles between which the history of intellectuals is magnetized: a sociology on the watch for influential trends, and a more empirical approach, a kind of *micro-storia*, in the sense understood by Italian historiography a few years back in the realm of social history. This is indispensable, as Sartre writes, since "an historical life is full of dangers and confrontations . . . The future is uncertain, and we are our own greatest threat, the world is our downfall. . . ." The world, yes—and also History, which is ultimately sole judge and which also, for the moment, has brought about some profound reversals. From the beginning of the 1980s in particular, the ashes of Camus came to reassemble themselves just as Sartre began a descent into hell—and Raymond Aron, after his death, moved directly into the company of heaven-dwelling thinkers. These two former *petits camarades* alternate roles in the intellectual world, which has always been a Valley of Hell for the one, and for the other, a Valhalla.

**Translated from the French by Jim Tucker**

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**FREDERICK FEIRSTEIN**

# Psychoanalysis and Poetry

Over the past several decades, one of the justifications for abandoning the "formalist" techniques of meter and rhyme as well as genres such as the linear narrative came from a misunderstanding of what psychoanalysis has to tell us about the nature of the unconscious. The unconscious was perceived as being totally "free," as in another sentimental fiction psychotics were perceived to be "free." (As common sense tells us, the psychotic, far from being free, is imprisoned by repetitive cryptosymbols, in this case hallucinations and delusions.) This misperception about the nature of the unconscious originated with the early modernists. When the misunderstanding became the received wisdom of their descendants, it was used to attack form for being an artificial imposition on unconscious processes, considered the source of creativity. But psychoanalysts know from clinical data that such expressions of the "free" unconscious we find in dreams and "free associations" (which gave rise to such phenomena as automatic writing) are actually the derivatives of fixed unconscious fantasies. Not only the clinical work of psychoanalysts but the recent work of neuroscientists and dream researchers lead us to understand that the unconscious, far from being lawless, is much like the universe of chaos and complexity theories. It has its own rules which lead to order, if we are trained to observe them. We call these rules the "primary processes" of displacement and condensation, and they are the same rules that form metaphors of poetry and the action metaphors of narrative and drama. What truly liberates us is learning and practicing these rules in art, including the art of psychoanalysis where the primary processes come under the sway of a strengthening preconscious or ego.

Ironically, psychoanalysis, which for much of the century had been central to our culture, has been maligned in recent years by academia, for much the same reasons as "formal" and narrative poetry. The art of psychoanalysis is essentially narrative in which the story of a person's life unfolds backwards, like a Greek tragedy, from effect to cause. The story is played out dramatically and symbolically in the transference whereby the analyst is experienced as different projected selves and "objects," i.e. significant others in the analysand's emotional development, both as they really were or as they were imagined to be. The consulting room is filled with many different mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and many

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versions of the self. The fantasies and traumas that helped form such selves and internalized others also come up in dreams told to the analyst and in free associations to dreams and other material. As treatment progresses, and the unfolding narrative and key metaphors reveal the motivations of the various selves, the analysand comes to realize that he or she is living a double life: one of conscious intent, the other an elaborate fantasy life which, because it is unconscious, repeats itself in countless scenarios similar to one another and having a distinct plot and subplots, all invented by the child.

As a narrative poet will use stock plots to structure a work, so the psyche will use stereotypical plots to structure unconscious fantasies, usually in response both to forbidden wishes and to traumas. Like the narrative poet, the child will creatively elaborate these stereotypes with details from his or her own particular history. In the course of treatment, analysand and analyst together eventually come to uncover or reconstruct such stock plots as the Oedipus Complex or the fantasy of anal birth or the Cinderella fantasy, to name a few that become what Jacob Arlow calls "the personal myth," guiding large parts of a person's existence.

From the way the child's psyche constructs such personal myths for survival and growth, we can infer a psychological foundation for the narrative impulse. As we are compelled to reenact such fantasies throughout our lives for gratification and adaptation, so some of us are compelled to reproduce them as narrative art. Over a lifetime we unconsciously create new versions of such myths in response to each new developmental phase or trauma. The psyche's reworking of such personal myths or fantasies finds a parallel in the maturing writer's repeating and developing key plot elements, themes, and patterns of imagery throughout a body of work. As all writers know, the act of exploring such fantasies creatively both helps resolve inner conflicts and leads to further thematic depth. When we are blocked or become boringly repetitive, it is because some aspects of the conflicts remain inaccessible to symbolic representation and instead lead to the cryptosymbols of symptoms, self-mimicry and sometimes despair. (It's at these times replaying the fantasies in the transference help the writing block—much as a good director will help a playwright rewrite a script; in this case a life-script.)

Because personal myths are based on stereotypes, i.e. universally shared myths, there is a resonance between the writer's work and the readers or audience who are themselves reworking such myths unconsciously day and night. When the lights dim in the theater or the reader creates an envelope of darkness around a book of poems, a trance-like state can develop in which the reader empathetically enters the writer's myth and can find solace and help with his or her own inner conflicts. We've all had the experience of a writer's inner life personally helping us when we were

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adolescents, and for some of us this experience has led us to become writers. For some reason, obscure to me now, reading Rimbaud's *Le Bateau Ivre* at seventeen had just such an effect on me. This trance state is one in which the preconscious (that part of the psyche connected both to the unconscious and to waking reality) becomes intensely active and synergistic. As writers we experience this when we're in the heat of creation. We also experience such a state in practicing the art of psychoanalysis, especially when the analysand talks metaphorically and with hypnotic rhythms. The analyst enters into the state empathetically, using his or her own preconscious, much as a method actor will do when getting into a role. Such an experience often happens when resistance to treatment (reflecting the unconscious defenses) is lowered and unconscious fantasies and their derivatives emerge in a flow of free associations and metaphors.

Analysts like myself will from the very first session listen very carefully for metaphors because they lead to the unconscious whose symbolic organization must be reworked for lasting change to take place. An analysand will use one or two central metaphors over and over again in treatment. They often will appear in seemingly casual comments about the self or reality as well as in dreams. Arlow finds that such central metaphors lead back to unconscious fantasies representing instinctual wishes and defenses against them. I've written about how such central metaphors lead back to traumas. These metaphors represent the self, traumas to the self, and the self's responses to the traumas. The psyche is poetic in its economical representation of disparate experiences. It will use a single metaphor to express an inner logic to the experience of several traumas, much as a poet writing a lyric sequence will elaborate a key metaphor to give the sequence a narrative continuity.

Such metaphors expressing traumas often appear in the very first session as clichés, not only because the person has tapped into a stereotype but also because the preconscious hasn't been flexible enough to revitalize the cliché and turn it into a true metaphor. When analysis is successful, we usually notice that the cliché becomes deeply felt and is used in the last phase of treatment in a totally different way from the way it was used in the first session. Also, where the self was initially represented in the cliché as passive, by the end of treatment the self becomes an active agent in the very same metaphor. So, for example, (as I've detailed in "Trauma, Fantasy, and Psychosomatosis") an analysand in his first session described how he was stuck by his obsessiveness in saying that he was "a car in neutral." The first dream he reported placed him in an old sports car he couldn't start up. Throughout the course of his analysis, there were many dreams involving cars, which we would learn represented various versions of his self. The metaphor of the sports car appeared in the last dream he reported, and

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neatly illustrates the change in his unconscious that took place as a result of our work together: "I am driving a white BMW. I won it in a contest. I'm driving down a street with the windows open. It's a beautiful day. I never thought a car would make me feel so good. It's a statement of being well-off, things going well, Fred. I'm just cruising along. A BMW. This is nicer than I thought."

This analysand's preconscious (which Suzanne Langer calls the "symbolizing transformer") had been strengthened by learning and practicing the art of psychoanalysis. He came to understand the car metaphor so well that even in the state of dreaming it became more resonant. His strengthened preconscious, freed by sleep from the tasks of reality, began playing with variations of the metaphor for new purposes—as a poet plays with metaphors, turning them around to create meaning.

His preconscious also became stronger by the very act of his narrating his dreams to both of us. He showed me over the years what Ephron and Carrington had found in a study of a number of R.E.M. dreams—that as a person progresses in analysis, not only do the symbols in the dreams become more communicative but the dream itself becomes more and more narrative. In their fascinating essay, Ephron and Carrington proved that when many people first come into treatment their dreams are not only fragmentary and/or incoherent, but often lacking in characters and having no linear action. But as the dreamers become healthier, characters appear in their dreams and so does plot—as if they were learning to use their preconscious processes much as a narrative poet does in writing a poem.

I've found that not only do people learn to use metaphors, symbols, and narration in practicing the art of psychoanalysis with me, but they also learn to use form, as a "formal poet" will use rhyme and meter both for creating a work of art and as a means to explore inner reality. Those of us who use meter and rhyme know that these devices, far from constraining us, help create the trance-like states which give us access to deeper and deeper levels of our psyche. We know, for instance, that rhyme leads to connections of meaning that are often consciously inaccessible. That's because rhyme seems to be a way of condensing several associative paths upwards from our unconscious fantasies.

One analysand of mine, as innovative in his treatment as he was in inventing his pathology, hit on a method for free association far more effective than telling me his dreams or saying whatever came to mind. He would dim the light in his bedroom and make up rhymes which he would write down on long sheets of paper. He would keep the rhymes rolling till they led to startling material hitherto preconscious or unconscious. As his rhyming helped lift unconscious material more and more from the constraints of repression, he not only became healthier, his rhymes became primitive poems.

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While working with him, I came across a book *(Interpretation of Language)*, now out of print, by an author quite brilliant and obscure named Theodore Thass-Thienemann who had found and proved in two volumes that etymology is another royal road to the unconscious. In a section entitled "Sound Association and Rhyme," he says:

> When there is an association of sounds, there will also be an association of meanings . . . If one inspects . . . one or another treatise on rhyme, one will find again and again an unwitting affirmation of the psychological interpretation through philological data. . . .
>
> Sound associations elicit some pleasure from the store of narcissistic echolalia as experienced by the small child. It springs up from the earliest unconscious layer of language. It is genuine with the forgotten language of unconscious fantasies. The analytical interpretation tries to translate the language of unconscious fantasies into the common spoken language. The rhyme is one of the characteristics of this almost forgotten and unknown language of fantasies.

Thass-Thienemann is only one of many psychoanalytic writers who use terms from poetry to explain how the psyche works, both to create pathology and health. There are four (Susan Den, Laurence Kubie, Henry Krystal, and Joyce McDougall) who are particularly interested in describing how deficiencies in the use of symbols lead to pathology, and how a fluid use of symbols within the psyche and between the psyche and the outer world helps create health. Den's model of health is the artist in the act of creation. When we are "healthy" the preconscious shuttles symbols back and forth between unconscious and conscious processes. When we become "unhealthy," it is because the preconscious has become too rigidly attached either to reality or to unconscious processes. Instead of negotiating inner and outer life with resonant symbols, the preconscious relies on clichés and signs which cut off affect or merely discharge it in random action.

So, for example, when severe or repeated trauma occurs, there follows such a gross inability to symbolize affect that the shocked psyche comes to rely almost totally on signs. A Vietnam Veteran I treated would try to read other people for emotions so he could guess at making the right response to situations. His manner of speech was what Krystal calls "aprosodic"—almost totally devoid of cadence. When I'd ask for associations to his dreams (which were few and minimal), he'd mechanically tell me more details without rhythmic coloring, much as a small child will tell the plot of a movie.

Joyce McDougall's second book is called *Plea For A Measure Of*

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*Abnormality*. She sees the formation of symptoms as crucial in helping such a numbed psyche survive—especially when the alternative is life-endangering psychosomatic illness, where the numbed psyche becomes driven to use the body mutely to communicate pain. McDougall helps such people ward off dangerous psychosomatosis with verbally-based, protective symptoms of neurosis. Once a neurosis is formed, McDougall then gradually helps bring the defended psyche to the true and flexible symbolization processes we call health.

Like most analysts today, particularly those who focus on narration and symbolization, McDougall is very careful not to use diagnostic categories to describe people. Instead, in her fascinating books *Theaters Of The Mind* and *Theaters Of The Body*, she elaborates a theater metaphor both for understanding failures in symbolization processes and for describing the inner voyages she and her patients go on to recover them:

> In taking the theater as a metaphor for psychic reality, I am hoping to avoid the standard psychiatric and psychoanalytic classification of clinical entities. These terms apply to symptoms, not to people. To designate someone as a "neurotic," a "psychotic," a "pervert," or a "psychosomatic" is little more than name-calling and is inadequate to describe anything as complex and subtle as a human personality. It not only fosters the illusion that we have said something pertinent about somebody, but implies that the rest of us are free of the psychic dramas that lie behind the symptoms to which these terms refer.
>
> Each secret-theater self is . . . engaged in repeatedly playing roles from the past, using techniques discovered in childhood and reproducing, with uncanny precision, the same tragedies and comedies, with the same outcomes and identical quota of pain and pleasure. What were once attempts at self-cure in the face of mental pain and conflict are now symptoms that the adult *I* produced, following forgotten childhood solutions. The resulting psychic scenarios may be called neuroses or narcissistic disorders, addictions or perversions, psychoses or psychosomatoses, but they originate from our childlike *I*'s need to protect itself from psychic suffering.

The analyst symbolically enters the analysand's poetic dramas with the view of helping to re-write them, so they do not remain fixed unconscious guides for constricted living. In order to do this safely, analysts must have an intimate knowledge of their own "inner characters and secret scenarios" which comes from their own analysis and subsequent self-analysis. The analyst, in effect, has to be analyzing two people in the session, the

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analysand and him or herself, with a full awareness that the analysand will be taking them on journeys into regions sometimes unknown and dangerous to both of them. In each analysis, somewhat of a joint cure will take place, if the analyst remains open and persistently questioning.

Roy Schafer in *The Analytic Attitude* calls psychoanalysis "a dialogue" and describes it as a narrative, one in which the confused and confining story about the self that one has learned to live by is actively re-experienced in the transference and arduously revised, as a poet's narrative would be. Schafer says,

> People going through psychoanalysis—analysands—tell the analyst about themselves and others in the past and present. In making interpretations, the analyst retells these stories. In the retelling, certain features are accentuated while others are placed in parentheses; certain features are developed further, perhaps at great length. This retelling is one along psychoanalytic lines . . . the division into analyst and analysand does not provide for the increasing extent to which the analysand becomes coanalyst of his or her own problems and, in certain respects, those of the analyst too. The analysand, that is, becomes a more daring and reliable narrator.

In conclusion, we might say that the ultimate goal of analysis is to help people achieve self-cure by helping them become better narrative poets—with a seasoned ability to convert the cryptosymbols of symptoms into metaphors, and to re-write the motivations and aims of their inner characters so that the plot of their lives can change as best as the circumstances of reality will allow.

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**SHARONA BEN-TOV**

# The Israel Science Corps

On the eve of Israel's independence, in 1948, a small kibbutz in the Negev desert heard a series of explosions, and saw, overhead, unfurling red ribbons attached to flying projectiles, one of which slightly damaged the water-tower. The kibbutz's machinist was my father, Itzik Bentov. He was experimenting with a recoilless rifle that he had built out of a water pipe. Satisfied with its performance, he took his rifle to Tel Aviv, where he joined the Science Corps, a secret unit run by the leading scientists in what was soon to be declared the Jewish state. A recoilless cannon developed from Bentov's rifle stands today in a museum in the heart of RAFAEL, Israel's national military research and development (R&D) institute.

The Science Corps is an untold story of Israel's founding. Most documents of the corps are classified information, inaccessible until the middle of the next century. Yet the corps played a key role in Israel's winning its war of independence, and in developing its Western-style technology and scientific establishment within a few decades. Because I wanted to know more about my father, who never mentioned his early work to me before he died, I interviewed members of the early Science Corps in 1995.

When Israel's independence was declared, David Ben-Gurion created the Science Corps as an official branch of the new Israeli Defense Force, with an annual budget of 10,000 lira or $3000—the most he could afford. The corps had been part of the Haganah, or Jewish underground; and originated in 1945, when the Association for Security Research was founded by an elite handful of scientists, working mainly at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and at the Haifa Technion, then a small engineering college. They included the prominent chemists Ephraim Katzir, later Israel's fourth president, and Ernst Bergman, later chairman of the national Atomic Energy Committee. These scientists and their best students tried to arm the Jewish community secretly, despite the British law against it. Far from the high-tech image that "security research" evokes, they operated on a shoestring budget typical of their community's resources. In 1947, a student who joined the underground Science Corps received clandestine instruction in coffeehouses, and worked with materials such as the nitrocellulose in discarded films from the local cinema. Lack of anti-tank weapons was the most urgent problem. In 1948, the Egyptian army advancing to within a few miles of Tel Aviv had "fifteen fighter planes, a

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regiment of Sherman and British Matilda tanks, and 25-pounder field guns." The Jewish defenses consisted of "two 20-millimeter guns and two Davidkas [primitive mortars] with ten shells . . . [and] not a single antitank weapon except mines and Molotov cocktails" (according to Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre in *O Jerusalem*). The Science Corps set to work trying to produce anything that looked like it might stop a tank.

A rooftop shed over an actor's apartment in Tel Aviv, was the corps' first headquarters. The technical director was an irascible Russian genius named Yevgeny Ratner, who had invented anti-submarine devices for the British navy; he had obtained his release from England only by pretending illness, and beseeching his superior officers to let him die in the Holy Land. Ratner divided the young scientists into groups and worked them around the clock. They slept on the stairs, searched junk shops for scrap-metal, and brainstormed together on the basis of technical knowledge gleaned from a few stolen British blueprints and an American rocketry manual stamped "Declassified." Since few of the students had relevant practical experience, an atmosphere of apprenticeship prevailed. Yaakov Rechter, the architect whose firm later shaped the face of Tel Aviv, recalls being assigned to draw plans for a mine; his artistically-shaded sketches threw Ratner into a fury, although the mine is still in use. Avraham Löwi, later chief engineer at RAFAEL, struggled to enforce production standards: the weapons were tooled in locksmiths' shops, whose workers, in the wake of British rule, still confused inches with centimeters, and called all grayish metals "steel." Löwi taught these machinists how to interpret standard designs, at the same time that he taught the fledgling scientists how to draft them. The project management skills that he learned in the process, Löwi says, helped forge the Science Corps into the working team that later created RAFAEL's arms development program. The team had to be especially good because it faced an unusual pressure: its prototypes went straight from the workshop to the front. Often, the war left no time for testing; or the corps inadvertently supplied the army when new weapons were demonstrated. Demo models tended to vanish into army jeeps, while officers explained that they could not wait. The corps' commander, the redoubtable pioneer Shlomo Gur, seldom objected.

Ten years earlier, Gur had invented a system by which prefabricated kibbutzim could be raised in a day; he oversaw the raising of fifty such settlements. He also initiated and directed the building of the national water pipeline, which irrigates the Negev desert. After the war, he founded Tel Aviv University, the Israel Museum, and numerous other institutions; his current project, the fruit of patient planning, is the creation of new water sources in cooperation with Jordan. Commanding the Science Corps, however, was the one project for which Gur had no enthusiasm. A "civilian

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type" who disliked wearing a uniform, he committed himself to the command after taking a prewar inventory of Israel's weapons reserves, which appalled him. He organized the corps headquarters, recruited its personnel, boosted its morale, acted as liaison to the army, reported to Ben-Gurion—and hid his private dread that Israel faced defeat. Each morning, in the bohemian Café Cancan, he met with General Yitzhak Sadeh to discuss what weapons the Science Corps could supply for the army's operations. Then he would go to Ben-Gurion's office, where, in Gur's words, "Ben-Gurion would clutch the ends of his armrests, already impatient, because I would never sign on anything that we couldn't produce. I told him the truth about all those gimmicks that the scientists thought up, which he wanted immediately." So desperate was Ben-Gurion, and so great his belief in Jewish scientific genius, that he assigned Haim Murro, an engineer, to screen the letters pouring in from would-be inventors. Their ideas included giant magnets, to pull aircraft out of the sky, and curved gunsights, for shooting around corners. Murro, who opened Israel's first oil well, observes that these fantasies were, at least, in keeping with the style of creative improvisation that was beginning to characterize Israeli technology.

The Science Corps, which institutionalized this style, was not inventing so much as reinventing. During the first months of the war, the U.N. arms embargo on the Middle East combatants prevented Israel from acquiring anti-tank weapons, so the Science Corps relied on the memories of people like Ratner, who had fought with the Allies. Flame-throwers, bazookas, recoilless cannon, infrared lanterns, smoke bombs, hand grenades, road-mines, M2 and M6 mortars, and the shoulder-launched PIAT (Personal Infantry Anti-Tank unit) were among the devices to be reproduced. Sometimes efforts went awry: a version of the hollow charge, for instance, famously failed to breach the walls of Jerusalem. More often they succeeded. In a conference with Ben-Gurion, Ratner vowed to produce the PIAT "if I have to do it with a hammer and anvil." The corps possessed almost no technical data on the device. When a PIAT was found, through devious routes, they feared to dismantle it—no one knew how it was assembled. But by the war's end, working with Israel's nascent munitions factories, the Science Corps had produced 1,800 PIATs, and 77,000 PIAT shells. (Figures taken from a memorandum of Ratner's, in the Weizmann Institute Archives.)

How was success achieved? The corps developed a flair for improvising on the weapons sent straight into combat, or, as the joke went, "from the producer to the consumer." Murro describes how he would drive a batch of experimental bombs out to the Sde Dov airstrip, near Tel Aviv. He would load the bombs onto a plane, wait for the pilot to complete a bombing run, then take the pilot's "consumer report" back to headquarters for

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analysis. This feedback cycle, says David Vofsi, a chemist specializing in rocketry, made the corps an evolutionary mutant. He points out that while technology normally has traditions—for example, a European river town evolves centuries of hydromechanics—the Science Corps' technology sprang up overnight. By 1949, the corps' rocketry had absorbed its foreign models and become Israeli in its unorthodox style. "Instead of tradition," Vofsi concludes, "Israel has improvisation." Creativity, as important as feedback, was cultivated by the Science Corps' leaders. Aharon Katzir, President Katzir's brother and an eminent chemist who greatly influenced operations, opposed assigning military ranks to the corps on the grounds that rank stifled creativity with "regimented thinking." Instead, when a scientist met with an army officer, he or she temporarily wore that officer's insignia. The Science Corps abounded in solutions that were offbeat and cheap. Meir Birk, now a nuclear physicist, measured the firing rates of guns by shooting at a cardboard disk revolving on a Pathéphone turntable, then measuring the angles between the holes. He used this method to assess prototypes of the Uzi. Vofsi, who invented a mold for casting multiple rods of propellant, solved the problem of rods cracking or sticking to the mold by combining the propellant with castor oil, on the same principle as a cake mix.

The original builders of Israel's defense arsenal are corps members. After the war, the corps' northern base became a Ministry of Defense complex, and was turned into the acronymically-named RAFAEL during the 1950s. Löwi credits the corps with generating scores of ideas which RAFAEL, in the years afterwards, refined into "a few big things." (When asked which things, he grins and says, "I can't tell you. I can't hint, either.") Dr. Moshe Epstein is the inventor of the first Western sea-to-sea missile, the Luz, from which he developed the use of solid propellant sustainer motors in subsequent Israeli missiles. He concurs that the Science Corps set a general pattern of creativity for defense research. As a longtime project head at RAFAEL, Epstein stresses creative improvisation in the design philosophy that he practices, and has taught to engineering groups. "The worst obstacle to creativity," he avers, "is fear of the unknown. An R&D project must have a clear goal that is a little impossible—if you know the answer, it's not an R&D project." The inventor must free his imagination, and not be afraid of making mistakes in order to find fresh approaches. A clear goal, on the other hand, removes the temptation of trying to conquer all limits, and prevents inefficient overdesign. Ideally, like the Science Corps', RAFAEL's creativity is adapted to the "consumer's" needs.

For some, the Science Corps' mission of imagining and creating viable defenses meant overcoming the limits of history itself. Bentov, the kibbutznik, continued to experiment with water pipes, and invented the Science Corps' first rocket. Birk recalls testing it: "We lit the fuse. It flew

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ten meters. We looked at each other and cried, 'There goes the first Jewish rocket!' Our rocket was primitive, but it worked. We had a future. For us, it was a little bit like the Manhattan Project." The comparison with the Manhattan Project, however, can be misleading. On one point, the Science Corps members all agree: unlike the Manhattan Project and the results of Sputnik in the U.S., Israel did not need a war to develop a strong scientific establishment. This view may seem to contradict history. The Weizmann Institute of Science, like RAFAEL, became a corps base in 1948. After the war, the Ministry of Defense sent several corps members abroad for education; when they returned, they worked under the ministry until, following government cutbacks, they were settled at Weizmann as its first generation of physicists and chemists. Yet, to conclude that Israeli science is a war spin-off would be to ignore the priority that science always had for Israel's political leaders, and the values of the scientists themselves.

Ephraim Katzir, a preeminent figure at the Weizmann Institute as well as Israel's president, claims that the Science Corps was politically possible because Ben-Gurion believed that science was Israel's sole means of development. The first prime minister frequently stated that science must make up for Israel's lack of natural resources. In Ben-Gurion's words, "Israel will not perform its mission—carrying out development operations, and absorbing large immigrant populations, unless science reigns in all branches of life." (Ephraim Katzir cites "Behilakem Yisrael," in an article of his own to support his claim that Ben-Gurion made science a priority; I spoke with Dr. Katzir in 1992.) The origins of the Weizmann Institute attest to the fact that science was a national priority before the war. In the early thirties, it was founded by (and later named after) Chaim Weizmann, the prominent chemist and venerable head of the World Zionist Organization, whose labors were instrumental in bringing about the Balfour Declaration. In 1948, appointed Israel's first president, Weizmann took up residence at the Institute. The Science Corps was ensconced, and Egyptian planes were bombing the local populace. But Weizmann shunned the idea of weapons production. Avraham Kogan, now director of the Institute's solar energy research center, fell afoul of Weizmann on this issue. Kogan made mines in his office, with the aid of four fifteen-year-old girl soldiers. On his door, the corps had hung a cartoon showing four babies playing with dolls, under Kogan's supervision. When the joke was explained to Weizmann, he was outraged. His disgust at the Science Corps' activities is expressed in his correspondence to close political aides; he had conceived the Institute as a center for pure science, and for applied research benefiting agricultural and industrial development.

Today, the Institute is what Weizmann envisioned, thanks largely to the cultural values of the Science Corps members. It is important to realize

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that for them, the meaning of any profession was deeply influenced by the Zionist idealism of their generation. They viewed their careers with a sense of collective purpose. A typical example: Gvirol Goldring, former chairman of the Weizmann physics department and developer of its particle accelerator, had gone into physics planning to teach high school, since teachers were needed in the Jewish settlement. The growth of the Science Corps into a research institute changed Goldring's horizons, but not the importance that he and his colleagues gave to what they called "building the country." This is best evinced, perhaps, by the fact that after completing doctorates at schools like MIT and Columbia, during a U.S. economic boom that paralleled the worst depression and lowest standard of living in Israel's history, almost all the scientists chose to return to Israel. Exact numbers are hard to establish, but of the thirty-five personally known to me, only three settled abroad. (Even long distance, ties among the corps remained close. Living in Boston in the 1970s, Bentov collaborated with Goldring on a method for halting an Egyptian invasion, using a giant cordite-filled plastic bag. Inflated explosively on the bottom of the Suez canal, the device would cause an artificial tidal wave.)

The contention of Stef Wertheimer, Israel Prize laureate and owner of Iscar, a billion-dollar high-tech firm, is that the goal of "building the country" must be adapted to the global marketplace. A corps member, Wertheimer founded Iscar as a small producer of carbide metal-cutting tools, in 1952. Though business' claims to good works are often suspect, Wertheimer's are nationally acknowledged, especially in education. Besides apprenticeship programs for high school students and soldiers, Iscar runs the Zur Industrial Institute, a mechanical engineering college, and the Tefen School for Entrepreneurs. Wertheimer has also established a model town of privately-owned, affordable homes with superior community services for workers, and is continuing to build industrial parks.

When Mr. Shimon Peres recently visited the U.S., I had the opportunity to ask him what he thought now of the Science Corps, which he had actively supported in its various stages. With a warm, reminiscent smile, he said, "The Science Corps people were an extraordinary, brilliant group. And without doubt, their work is at the foundations of Israel's industrial and defense technology." In sum, the Science Corps' achievements are central to Israel's emergence as a technological and scientific leader in the Middle East.

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**KAREN WILKIN**

# At the Galleries

In Paris, not long ago, before greedy landlords drove them elsewhere, a group of the most serious painters and sculptors working near the Bastille used to hold an annual studio exhibition called "Le Génie de la Bastille." During the run of the show, the neighborhood was transformed. Visitors clutching maps provided by the exhibitors wandered in and out of the alleys and courtyards of the old furniture-making workshops that the artists had colonized, searching for *fond du cour, escalier 17, 4e étage.* Curators, collectors, art dealers, artists, afficionados, and the merely curious strode along the Faubourg St. Antoine and the Rue de Charonne, trying to cover as much territory as possible. In Le Génie's last years, when membership in the exhibiting artists' association was at its peak and the open studios extended across the entire quartier, the event was known as *le jogging de la Bastille.*

I think of this whenever I go to Chelsea these days. When the newly "hot" district's galleries are open, those wide, windswept, *long* crosstown blocks are populated by determined-looking art lovers armed with *Gallery Guide*, moving as purposefully as the Bastille "joggers" and, often, looking as perplexed as anyone seeking *fond du cour, escalier 17.* It's debatable whether their consternation is due to the difficulty of finding widely dispersed galleries among auto body shops, windshield repair emporia, and steel-shuttered vacant buildings ripe for conversion, or if it is a reaction to the raw newness of the area. (The overpowering reek of what I think was fresh concrete and even fresher paint recently made me leave Max Protech's splendid 22nd Street space sooner than an extremely interesting exhibition of the Japanese architect Tadeo Ando's drawings warranted.)

The puzzled looks may also be provoked by the sheer magnificence and amplitude of the Chelsea galleries. Art often seems subordinate to stylish design in these vast, pristine, elegant, and—I am sorry to say—sometimes pretentious spaces, a problem compounded by the current taste for sparse installation. The other side of the coin is pretentiousness on the artist's part—over-blown, over-scaled work clearly made in response to the heady prospect of thirty foot walls—but I suppose it is both irresistible and a necessary precaution, given the number of visitors I have watched enter one of the new galleries, admire the ceiling and the light fixtures, glance at the art, and go on to the next spectacle.

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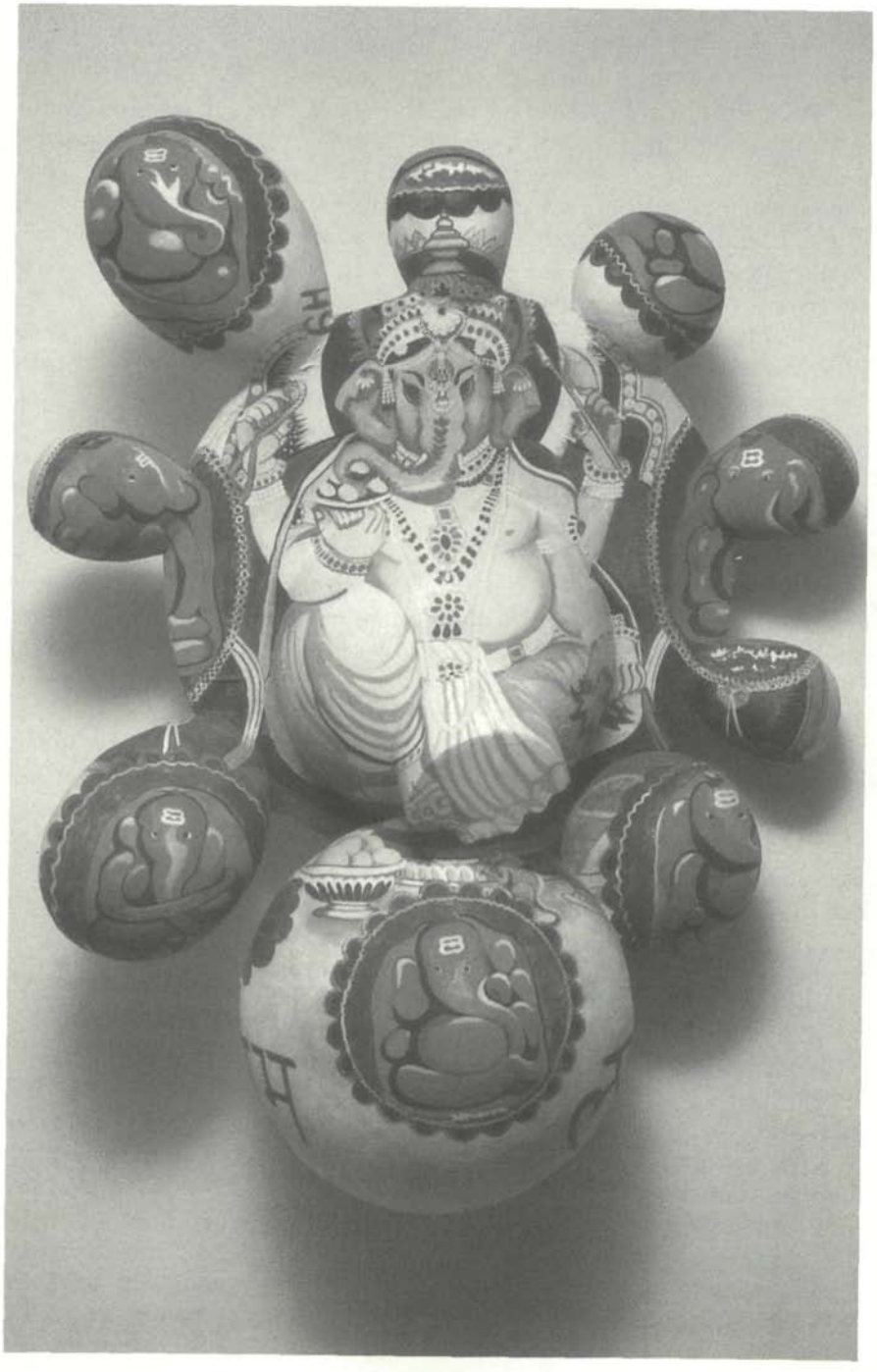

*Correspondence* (1994) by Jill Levine. Oil on darwi, plaster, and styrofoam. 22 inches by 17 inches by 9 inches. Courtesy of A.R.T. Resources Transfer, Inc.

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But the Chelsea art scene is not exclusively glittering megaspaces; counterpoint is provided by the occasional funky, domestic-scale gallery. Sometimes the shows are interesting, too, as in the series of two-person "conversation exhibitions" inaugurated by the ambiguously named Art Resources Transfer. The premise is fairly fluid; either one artist is invited to show and chooses a companion from among his or her colleagues or the gallery selects two artists who may or may not know each other or some variation of the above. This spring, Jill Levine and Susan Wanklyn, who have followed each other's work for some time, showed wildly dissimilar but curiously compatible paintings and sculptures. Levine's wall-mounted constructions—complex gatherings of biomorphic forms with their surfaces covered by images of Hindu deities, especially the wise, elephant-headed Ganesha—seem at first acquaintance to be the antithesis of Wanklyn's cool, matte paintings—subtle grids "woven" out of broad vertical and horizontal strokes. But each artist's work depends on intense color and on the intelligent manipulation of associations. Levine's bunched, swollen ovoids play games with Indian sculpture's tradition of erotic, fleshy bodies and multiple limbs, a connection both strengthened and subverted by the vernacular Ganeshas uneasily imposed on the bulging forms. The kitsch naturalism of these images, in turn, heightens our awareness of the liberties Levine takes with shape and mass. Wanklyn forces us both to recapitulate her process in constructing her paintings and to think freshly about what we are seeing. The simplicity and familiarity of her deadpan grids make it essential that we pay close attention to intersections and repetitions, intervals and abutments. The tremulous edges of the color bands declare the presence of the painter's hand, while the layering and sequence of her bold strokes subtly alter our perceptions of their hues. I particularly liked one of Wanklyn's small works, with widely-spaced creamy bands and lots of air, but the most striking aspect of the show was the way Levine's sculpture clarified Wanklyn's paintings, and vice versa.

Those seeking intimacy in Chelsea should visit Bernard Plasse's tiny Galerie du Tableau, a fragment of the cultural life of Southern France, transplanted as a full-size replica on 26th Street between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues; a series of mini-exhibitions by well-known and emerging artists from the Marseille area will continue at least until the end of June. In Marseille, where the adventurous gallery and its director, a poet and former art critic, are institutions (as is Plasse's amazing moustache), guests at the weekly *vernissages* view the current exhibition from a narrow street, through the window; in New York, they congregate in a former truck bay of the West Chelsea Arts Building. Plasse's taste is decidedly eclectic. So far, the exhibitions have ranged from Alun Williams's disquieting images of a serene, harmonious countryside whose inhabitants are explosive painting gestures to Sylvie Réno's parodic sculpture in

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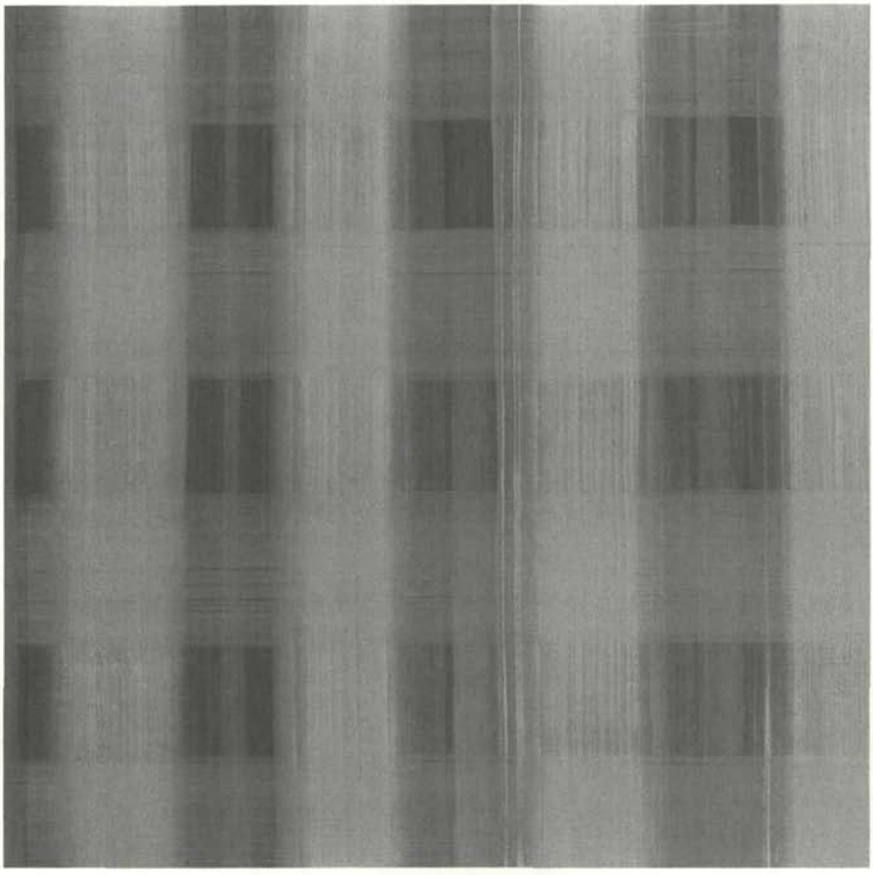

*Diaphone* (1997) by Susan Wanklyn. Casein on wood panel. 36 inches by 34 inches. Courtesy of A.R.T. Resources Transfer, Inc.

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corrugated cardboard, set against meticulous drawings comparing extinct marine organisms and obsolete weapons; from Francis R.'s constructions of Rube Goldberg-type electrical circuits constructed out of unlikely scavenged materials, to Valerié Bourdel's miniature, subdued existential dreamscapes—including an elusive image of a mauve helicopter melting into grey-blue haze. And there's more to come. It's an engaging project, as much for its energy and its spirit of wholehearted commitment to the importance of contemporary art as for the qualities of individual works. And the modest, improvised character of the whole enterprise is a welcome antidote to the sleek new art palaces of the neighborhood.

Elsewhere in New York this spring, lovers of sculpture might savor *A Century of Sculpture: the Nasher Collection*, at the Guggenheim. The breadth of the collection assembled by Raymond Nasher and his late wife, Patsy, is so impressive that it's hard to know where to begin, but it's safe to say that at the Guggenheim Rodin, Matisse, Giacometti, and David Smith were represented with particular brilliance and special depth. Most of Smith's enduring preoccupations were visible in a series of first-rate pieces, from an early González-inspired head to a mysterious transitional polychrome "landscape" to a triumphant Voltri Wagon, made in Italy three years before the artist's death. Three sprawling, unignorable early Caros attested both to the potency of Smith's legacy and its transformation. A group of three closely-related busts by Giacometti of his brother Diego, set in a context of sculptures from every part of the artist's career, made the individuality of each work more apparent. Rare plaster versions transformed such iconic images as Picasso's early Cubist head of Fernande Olivier or Rodin's *Age of Bronze*.

As a whole, the collection offered an overview of the history of Modernism in sculpture, with some engaging quirks—on the plus side, delicately inflected, seldom-seen, wax-on-plaster heads by Medardo Rosso and on the puzzling side, a surprising number of bombastic Raymond Duchamp-Villons. In the end, though, it seemed clear that the excellence of individual works outweighed their significance within a historical narrative or even within their authors' evolution. That's what made the show such a joy—and overcame even the infelicities of installing sculpture in the cramped, sloping bays of Frank Lloyd Wright's ramp, which is saying a lot.

For anyone engaged by the Medardo Rossos in the Nasher Collection, a small, choice exhibition at Kent Gallery was a must. Alternate versions of some of his most celebrated images, in slightly varied materials, addressed the thorny question of series and replication in this artist's work. Most dramatic was the less familiar polychrome *Maternity (Fragment)*, an urgently modelled relief of a nursing child, rendered as a sketchy shorthand of breast, baby's head, and mother's hands.

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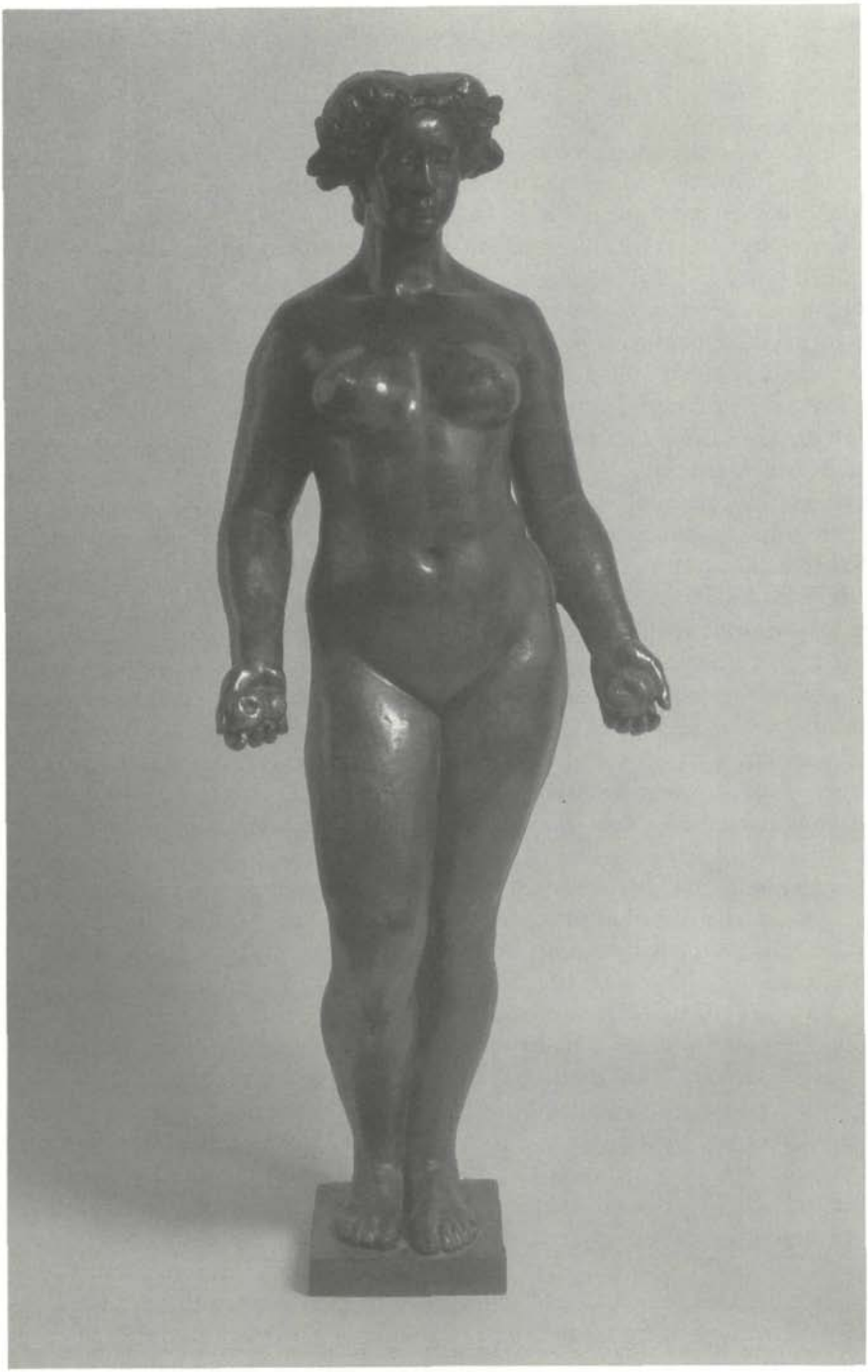

*Pomone aux bras tombants* (1937) by Aristide Maillol. Bronze. 66 1/8 inches by 17 3/4 inches by 17 1/4 inches. Courtesy of C&M Arts.

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One of the great pleasures of the spring was C & M Art's Maillol exhibition, organized in association with Thomas Gibson Fine Art, London, and the Musée Maillol, Paris, an impeccable selection of the sculptor's celebrations of the female body, testimonials to the paradoxical notion that full-throttle sensuality can be presented in the form of disciplined classicism. The exhibition's bronzes were all cast in Maillol's lifetime—except for his last work, of necessity cast posthumously—and their ravishing patinas offered a crash course in how nuances of color and reflectiveness can enhance form.

Many of Maillol's most characteristic images from all periods were present, from standing nymphs, the promise of their ripe flesh and offering gestures subdued by the erectness and near-symmetry of their poses, to crouching earth mothers, their sturdy arms and legs folded uneasily under their robust torsos; a group of intimate, boldly modelled drawings (and a single, rather lumpen canvas) added images and poses not accounted for by the bronzes. The range of the sculptures, from hand-sized statuettes to near-life-sized standing goddesses, underlined Maillol's sensitivity to scale; even when he repeated a pose in different dimensions, he always subtly readjusted it. In a seven inch version at C & M Arts, the celebrated seated nude, *La Nuit* (1902), resting her head and folded arms on her bent knees, was an emblem of withdrawal and, by extension, sleep, embodied by an open cube of weighty limbs and torso, all equally hefty and smooth. A monumental version of *La Nuit* in the Nasher Collection shared those qualities when seen from the front, as you moved up the ramp of the Guggenheim, but the descending view was a startling confrontation with a back as massive and implacable as the face of a cliff; Maillol thickened and spread *La Nuit*'s harmonious body forms to emphasize the inwardness of the sculpture rather than the anecdotal qualities of the pose.

Maillol's classicism is both archaic and implies the future—ironically, not the continuity of a tradition, but its death. Maillol closes doors. His figures are so idealized that the next step must be abstraction. Like Picasso's heroic nudes from the period just before *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*—which they anticipate by a good five years—Maillol's superwomen seem trapped by geometry. They move with difficulty, rarely escaping the dominance of vertical and horizontal axes; for all their voluptuousness, their flesh is unyielding, a series of linked convexities inseparable from the properties of brittle, smooth bronze. The eye slides from a swelling hip across a full belly to an up-thrust breast, a surface journey that reinforces both our awareness of the hardness of metal and the "outwardness" of Maillol's sense of form and mass. (This may be what Robert Pincus-Witten is getting at in a catalogue essay that links Maillol's "massive integrity and molecular forthrightness" to the work of Serra and the Minimalists.) The show made clear

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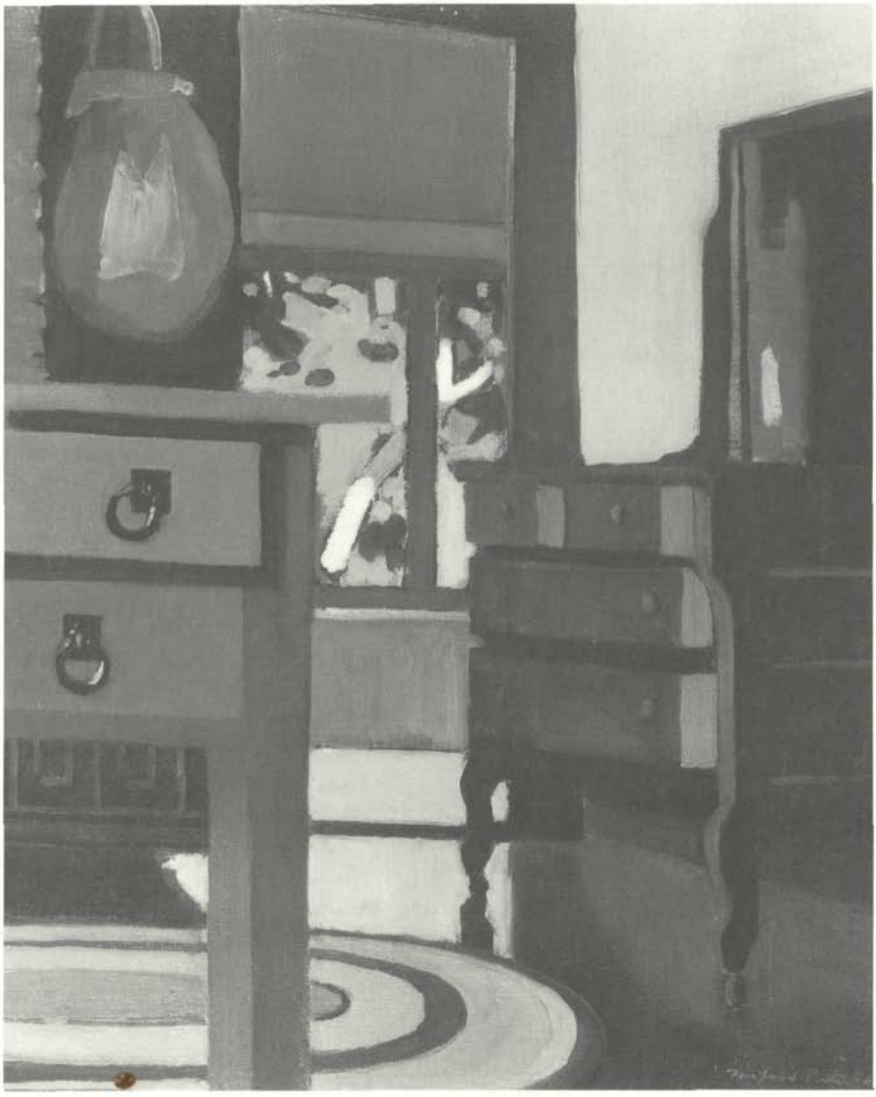

*Early Morning* (1966) by Fairfield Porter. Oil on canvas. 32 inches by 28 inches. Courtesy of Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

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how consistent Maillol's vision was—how having arrived at a potent conception of form early on, he continued to affirm it for the rest of his life. What is surprising is how cool and thoughtful that conception was, despite its trappings of fleshiness. Maillol's figures are severe, followers not of Dionysus, but of Apollo. They are inhabitants of a chaste Arcadia, an earthly paradise in which *luxe, calme, et volupté* are most accurately translated as "profusion, calm, and delight"—with no overtones.

The paintings of Fairfield Porter depict another kind of earthly paradise—suburban, uneventful, domesticated, and a little ragged around the edges. Like the Dutch painters of seventeenth-century domesticity and like Corot, whom he obviously admired, Porter is attuned to nuance and transience. His attention is engaged by the way light falls on the nondescript furnishings of a familiar room or by the way a change in season transforms an utterly unprepossessing corner of the landscape. Like his Dutch precursors and like Corot, Porter records these phenomena dispassionately, with feeling, but without sentimentality, apparently spending his emotion on ordering the randomness of the observable world on his canvas. Even when Porter paints his children and their friends, he does so with affection but detachment; the kids are never dressed up and the backgrounds are rather untidy.

Whatever Porter's nominal subject, his pictures are always primarily about paint. Interiors, gardens, beach scenes, suburban streets, portraits, are all excuses to explore juicy pigment applied in broad gestures. His main concern is to respond to the challenge of getting tones, hues, and planes *right* in order to evoke convincing spaces. It's fiercely intelligent (as well as often very beautiful) painting that makes you remember that Porter was also an articulate, independent-minded critic, as tough and straightforward in his assessment of his colleagues' work as he was in shaping his own.

Like his painting, Porter's criticism was esteemed in his lifetime, but has received only sporadic attention since his death in 1975. Fortunately, in the past few years, interest in both seems to be reviving, in the form of museum shows at Hunter College and elsewhere, rumors of a major retrospective, and most recently in this spring's well-chosen exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery—which gave Porter his first one-man show in New York, in 1951. Let's hope for more.

A more exotic earthly paradise, unfortunately, for today's sensibilities, one in which very bad things happen to endangered species, is the subject of the spectacular *Gods, Kings, and Tigers: The Art of Kotah* at the Asia Society through July 20. But the eloquent drawing, glorious color, and inventive staging of these marvelous Indian paintings (and some rare drawings) outweigh the brutality of the hunting scenes, some of which are very brutal, indeed. Most of the works exhibited—never seen outside of their

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*Madho Singh of Kotah Hunting Boar from Horseback* (c. 1730–40) attributed to Sheik Taju. Opaque watercolor, gold, metallic gray watercolor. 30.1 cm by 46.9 cm. Courtesy of the Asia Society.

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region in India—come from the royal collections of Kotah, a former princely state ruled from the early seventeenth century on by warrior-kings who allied themselves with the Mughal Emperors in Delhi, two hundred miles away. As the show richly proves, the court painting of Kotah was an inspired blend of Hindu and Islamic influences, with plenty of inventions of its own. At times, Hindu imagery dominates, as in a series of economically composed portraits of rulers performing religious rites; at others, Islamic prototypes are most evident, as in the horses of a polo match, with their arching necks and delicate feet. Some landscapes seem positively Chinese, but the cumulative effect is of great originality. The complex towers and courtyards of palaces and fortresses are represented through dizzying shifts of viewpoint that make the buildings seem to revolve on the page, revealing the myriad activities within. Subtle drawing, overlaying meticulously depicted animals against a saturated expanse of color, suggests thickets and underbrush. Lightning, illuminating a magnificently dressed warrior as he climbs a knotted rope to his lover's bedroom, is represented as golden snakes against a sky of boiling, dark grey clouds.

Because the hunting scenes are set in vast landscapes, they are among the most complex works in the show, often revealing their full intricacy and subtlety when studied with the magnifying glasses thoughtfully provided at the entrance to the exhibition. Frightened rabbits lurk in the underbrush as mounted hunters fire on tigers and wild boars; birds go about their business, while deer plunge through the forest, all rendered with fluid, sinuous silhouettes, an unerring sense of the telling shape, and an unfailing sense of placement. But it's really color that sets these glorious pictures apart, a rich palette of dry, matte hues ranging from deep mysterious greens to pale chalky apricots and resonant pinks, intensified by celestial blues. Most remarkable are the expanses of glowing saffron yellow and powdery cinnabar red, quintessentially Indian hues without precedent in Persian or Turkish painting, that help to determine the special character of Mughal art, in general, and the art of Kotah, in particular. But it's impossible to separate color from drawing or narrative or composition. The finest Kotah paintings can be read with equal pleasure and profit in many ways simultaneously: as satisfying orchestrations of colored shapes and as intricate accumulations of tiny anecdotal details; as vibrant records of a vanished way of life, even of a vanished landscape, and as timeless witnesses to the gifts of a group of accomplished artists, gifts that allowed them to transcend their nominal mission of glorifying the princes whom they served and create works of art that continue to absorb and fascinate viewers in another time, another place, and another culture. The power of the pictures in *Gods, Kings, and Tigers* is almost enough to reconcile me to a horrifying, but imaginately composed, exquisitely colored, and

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energetically drawn image of princely hunters shooting tigers who have been rounded up and imprisoned in a net—a major admission from a cat lover—although I would have to say that I found it more pleasurable to spend time with almost every other work in this wonderful show.

Curiously, the show most similar in spirit to *Gods, Kings, and Tigers* was the Mark Di Suvero installation at the Soho branch of Gagosian Gallery, despite the obvious differences in material, scale, patronage, and date. Like the Indian paintings, Di Suvero's mammoth construction of beams, girders, and rounds is a paean to power and self-aggrandizement, in this case personal, rather than royal, but no less impressive because of it. I've often been troubled, in Di Suvero's best known work, by the way bigness, for the sake of bigness, seems to be the main point, overwhelming issues of inflection and articulation. In the Gagosian installation, this was less problematic, perhaps because a logical relationship to setting was automatically imposed by the dimensions of the gallery itself. The three massive connected "events," each made of similar, but varied elements, each hovering in a different corner, seemed to thrust the walls, floor, and ceiling of the gallery apart, at once defining and exploding the constraints of the space. All in all, one of Di Suvero's best works to date.

An interesting footnote to the installation was provided by a show of Di Suvero's series of expressive, expressionist *Hands* from the 1960s, at the New York Studio School. These highly worked drawings and bronzes revealed deep connections with Rodin and Giacometti, as well as unexpected Surrealist overtones that should make you interrogate Di Suvero's familiar giant constructions in new ways.

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**DANIEL BOSCH**

## Home Thoughts From Aboard Continental Flight 94

*In memory of Joseph Brodsky*

1
Horizontal Babel,
Your high-pitched hex
Hums in the grunting thrust
Of this plane leaving LAX.

Over the palm-lined, blue Pacific
Cruise ships proud as banks
Wink as I look down
On the land of the swank.

Oh, to be over America!
Where flight attendants' prose
Lulls the savage child
In each of thirty rows,

And I scan, in trimeter,
Dying for a hit,
The outlines of ghost cigarettes
They leave so brightly lit.

2
Mesas tabled when
Seas last litigated
Silently testify
On behalf of Time Incorporated.

The canyon's grand scansion
Is so irregular
The river must not know
The future of free verse—

Yet still its silt slowly
Reveals the past,
And layer by layer
Measures what lasts.

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3
A checkerboard of farms
Gives way to greeny disks
Less perfect for bright barns'
Sudden radar blips

And skinny tangent highways
That bisect golden sheaves
Count the country's blessings
In lucky cloverleaves.

4
On midwest Sunday nights
The bare, bold parking lots
Of empty shopping malls
Wear only leopard spots.

So it seems the tiger
Has changed its stripes—
Or commerce here prefers
To choose its own disguise.

5
Manhattan gridlock's
Red and white glazes
Straighten its teeth
Like a set of braces.

A smile I recognize—
Black bottom teeth, caries
Backlit by cavities
Full of actuaries—

But our nose wheel's skid
On Newark's hard tarmac
Brings me "down" again
With the Trade-Centered Karnak

That sparkles and shimmers
Like a wet, half-full cup
Of words I should know
But still have to look up.

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**PETER FILKINS**

## Elegy for Joseph Brodsky
(1940–1996)

I

It was winter and a star
inscribed the darkness early,
its light, having traveled far,
become its elegy.

Elsewhere, a samovar
brewed the morning's tea,
its shadow, the vernacular
that traced a cyrillic *B*—,

as above, the pulsing star
burned on just as brightly,
the unappointed avatar
of one's proximity

to Time's unwritten grammar,
whose conjugate, geography,
echoes a throat's own *r*
breaking across the sea.

Or even space—that star!—
its ray's autonomy
striking an open calendar
incandescently:

the page gone blank, *thus far*
translated to *what will be.*
It was winter and a star,
and then infinity.

II

The 'wan flat voice' is free,
alive in rivulets of meter
auguring an ocean,
a coastline or hemisphere,
outdistancing your gaze,

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cloudy and distracted,
that scanned a chiseled beam
for cherubim and seraphim
you doubted there, yet praised.

Your friends will miss you—
your mind, intimate as a razor,
or filling an auditorium,
the pitch of your guttural tenor;
cafes, bars, and canals
all stand emptier,
your death expanding space
to the sinister proportions
of loss, of a vacant face.

Yet anchored in a sigh,
in the backwash of a whisper,
poetry will survive,
since loss becomes it—
like a cold its nasty cough,
or breath the tenor's note;
like a daughter's hidden love
for smoke that drifts within
a window's sunlit moat.

III

Poet, if you're near,
look down upon these lines,
as another criminal year
cuts its teeth on sorrow,
as another millennium spills

into the new one's zeros,
as another decade fills
its quota of corpses, sutures,
as terror's partisan love
trades in wreckage like futures,

while you within the spheres
in neutral exile rest—
one through whose part of speech
the language lived, was served,
and by whom its truth was blessed.

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## ALLEN GROSSMAN

### Weird River

We sit down on the rocks above a river,
Like three crows in a ruin. Star Asper burns
In the pure heaven. The voice of the Star
Utters one law: *You must account for everybody.*
The night is cold and getting colder. Dawn,

Far away. —Suddenly the first crow asks,
"How shall I start?" The burning Star replies
"Look down. What do you see?" The first crow says,
"It's cold enough to snow." "You can't *see* cold,"
Says the Star. "OK, I see a girl washing

A corpse," says Crow One. "Also, a big dog."
—By this time, the other crows are getting restless.
They want to say something. But the night wind
Is cold and makes a loud sound. —"Was this ruin
Ever whole and a flourishing house. . .?"

Whispers the second crow under his breath.
The burning Star sighs. He can hear small sounds.
"This place was always a ruin, where gather
All souls in flocks toward the wild migration
From life to life in the same world." Star Asper

Smiles down on the tumult at the dark river.
Then the second crow, having found a hollow
In the ruined wall, quickly falls asleep
And cries in his dreams. —Crow Three says, "Look, Star,
One law is too many. I can't do it."

"Then I'll add another law," says Star Asper
In a great voice: *No other book than YOURS!*
—The dog howls at the light. Frightened by the
Dog, the three crows fly away. And rosy Dawn,
In tears, is heard to say: "Weird river, flow on."

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## EUGENIO MONTALE

### Rebecca

Every day I find myself coming up short:
I'm missing the total.
The items to be added are perfectly right,
but the overall total?
Rebecca watered her camels
and herself too.
I attend to pen and messkit
for myself and for others.
Rebecca was thirsty, I'm starved,
but we won't be absolved.
There wasn't much water in the wadi, a few puddles maybe,
and not much kindling in my kitchen either.
Still, for ourselves, for everyone, we tried, in smoke,
in mud, with a few live bipeds or even quadrupeds.
O meek Rebecca whom I never met!
Hardly a handful of centuries divides us,
the twinkling of an eye for those who grasp your teaching.
Only the divine is total in sip and crumb.
Only death triumphs when you ask for both.

**Translated from the Italian by William Arrowsmith**

## PETER SACKS

### Night Ferry

Blood-drop, lung of fire setting past
the seabell and the wave; why am I separate
from that giant burrowing into further life?

The body breathes and rides
a heavy-netted ocean swollen
by the tide. Under the half-moon

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it's the lighthouse light that turns
the rest of me to early nightfall,
headland, home. I send it back,

a mirrored flickering across cold waters.
We allow ourselves the crest that breaks
above the surface then reforms.

We make it human and we call it love.
This wintering is my own and not the world's,
although the world is wintering.

**WILLIAM LOGAN**

## For A Woman In United Germany

What do the birds believe in, in Stuttgart?
I can see them, oily rags
around the fountains in the central square.
Are there fountains? Is there a square?

There are miniature mountains,
because you describe them,
and suburbs draped over them
like dirty canvases. Are the suburbs relaxing,

or just tired, tired of winter?
On our boarded-up shops there appeared
a poster of a black girl, naked to the waist,
a man's hands reaching around her

to cup her breasts. Soon white strips
covered her body like shreds of clothing
and she'd been torn a new mouth.
Every language is naked in its own way.

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I think of yours, voted into pure verbs.
Is there snow on the traitors now?
The moss-green slopes you crossed,
shiny and deceptive as satin lingerie—

where are the lies buried now?
The ramshackle sheds tilt north and south,
and barbed-wire posts and broken bushes
crook fingerlike out of the ground.

They kept their language and they lost their lives.

## LYUBOMIR LEVCHEV

### Flying Away

I think about flying away. I see
the sunset as the autumn of the skies.
Frost-tipped red light sweetens the air one last time.
A sigh becomes a prayer abroad.
I roll a word uphill toward the summit
of a futile song.
God surely speaks a different language.
And I do not know how much I understand.
It seems He has not created us,
but has merely admitted us
into His lonely meditations . . .
And now He has regrets.
But it is late.
Too late now.
The sunset is quenched. Longing is never quenched.
Clouds sink. Submarines leave Groton.
And night-flakes are falling like black snow.

**Translated from the Bulgarian by Chtiliana Halatcheva-Rousseva**

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**MARTA PETREU**

## Our Father

My mouth is defiled o my Lord sportive diseases nameless diseases of ruin
infest it
And what desolation: the wind whips through your pockets
in vain you turn them inside-out
nothing
no good tidings no new creature even approximating worth
Not even a feeble tolerance the vaunted mercy for your neighbor
Nothing

Nothing issues from your aged thighs
from your verbs
What wretchedness

I've rejected pain (glory be to chemicals
glory! they resolve moral dilemmas)
I refuse falling in love that suspect art: I smother it with a pillow
with tiny multi-colored pills
I suffocate nostalgia with a silk cord
Aha. The throbbing void the art of falling in love commits itself to a doctor's care
glory be to chemicals glory
Aha. I want the throbbing void in the center of my body not to hurt anymore
no Lord no

I have no doubt—nothing issues from your depleted thighs
from the stuttering of your lips
You
our father the mumbling one the muncher
where is your kingdom what now is your will on this earth known as marta
now and forevermore Lord
unnamable diseases of subjugation infest it
it hurts Lord I scream Lord
no you're no Lord
amen

**Translated from the Romanian by Adam J. Sorkin and Liviu Bleoca**

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## JENNIFER MICHAEL HECHT

### History

Even Eve, the only soul in all of time
to never have to wait for love,
must have leaned some sleepless nights
alone against the garden wall
and wailed, cold, stupefied, and wild
and wished to trade-in all of Eden
to have but been a child.

In fact, I gather that is why she leapt and fell from grace:
that she might have a story of herself to tell
in some other place.

## LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

### Cactus Bride: The Rain Birth of Onima

Six days out of jail,
Winfred Dania
visited Franz's class on Bonaire legends
in the Historic Museum.
He found himself
spellbound by the colorful maps and graphs
linking each great myth
to land sites
it adorned. More a lesson
in geography, Franz taught his pupils to know the special rocks,
caves and pools that defined the unique landscape
of their home isle. They must never forget—the beauties of desert
locale came first, the legends
slowly unfolding therefrom.

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*Go now, touch*
*the rocks. O bend down and kiss each sacred*
*stone. Become the daughter*
*or sweet son*
*of the Planet by embracing your true turf.*
*Then study the Myths. . . .*
Franz spotted

Winfred making sketches
on a cheap legal pad in his clipboard. He strolled down the aisle
as he lectured to the few students, hoping to catch
sidelong glimpse of Win's pencilled jottings: no notes, he observed
at once, but pictures—drafts
in minute scale that caught
the true gist
of Franz's verbal depictions of those remote
caves and volcanic rock piles
which gave life
to Bonaire's rich folklore. Other drawings
portrayed the myths themselves:
pencil lines
and crosshatched woven
shapes on the page captured the tales as quickly as mentor Franz
could utter them. Perhaps Winfred knew no language
but the vocabulary of pictures: luminous portraits like Medieval
Exemplums. And how, he wondered,

had Winfred ever *come by*
such a gift?
When he put the question to him, he found
the artist oddly staring
upon his lips—
reading, reading, and Franz knew in a flash
this man must be deaf.
Never before
had the Museum Director
spoken with *The Deaf,* much less an earless druggie ex-con artist
of seventeen—thin and malnourished . . . But they hit

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it off, from the start. Winfred, just released from a nine-month
jail sentence for heavy opium
abuse, was on strict parole,
having to report,
after class, to the Deputy Police Officer.
That very afternoon, Franz
hastened to court
to sign up as the youth's legal guardian.
And soon, the white midaged
Carib Indian

and his black phantom
*alter ego* had struck up a rare marriage of hearts and minds. Folks
on the street, in market or tavern, supposed Dania
to be Franz's adoptive son, so rarely were those two men beheld
apart, outside Franz's business
hours at the museum: the one
rattling off
multiple versions of key Myths and Legends
he'd collected from visits
with the *Elders*
in homes of his students; while the other,
notepad in hand, scrawled
quick portraits
of enchanted characters
and settings to illumine the oral texts—sketches he would later
work up into full-scale paintings in oils, temperas,
gouaches. Together, they reconnoitered the sacred caves and ponds,
the shoreline sites and coastal

promontories, Franz fast
with anecdotes
of his own boyhood hideaways and stakeouts
in these wilds. He'd raged
to learn contours,
the lay of flatlands and highlands alike:
those identifying marks
of earth's corpus—

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nose holes, ear gulleys,
eye craters and mouth tunnels, as if the land itself were replica
of his own body. Or rather, those circuits of cave
grottoes had grown as familiar as curve, valley, orifice, hollow
of his lover's body, and Franz
was hellbent to share them—
one and all—
with his young disciple, as eskimo forks
over mate to a houseguest . . .
For workspace,
he gave Winfred free and unlimited use—
sole access—to his tool
and machine shed,

haven of the older man's
two decades as an inventor. Franz's secret hobby had lain fallow
for the past year, a time of giving over mechanical
discoveries for the arts. He turned his hand to metal sculpture,
often salvaging the old wrecked
apparatus—pipes and gauges,
rubber tubing
from failed inventions—in totem pole highrise
collages: Watts Towers in L.A.
a prototype
for his free-flying buttresses, his catchall
multistoried accretions of lofty
prize-winning
mosaics. Two best tierworks
found permanent niches at street corners, monuments of the cross-
roads, for all passing traffic—donkey cart, minibus,
fish shuttle, meat wagon or foot trekkers—to relish on the fly.
Franz's one weak suit, his true

blind spot—he had no knack
or facility
for drawing, so Winfred filled this one gap
in his repertory of talents.
Their partnership
thrived: a top publisher of fine arts books
in Amsterdam teamed them up
to co-author
a first book of Bonaire

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Legends; our gifted lad would compose thirty apocalyptic scenes
to illustrate his tutor's thirty pages of text. . . .
The deaf painter, holed up beside those lathes, bunsen burners,
pyrex flasks, wide test tubes
& rotating electromagnetic
torque wheels
of Franz's shut-down laboratory, commenced
his premiere big canvas
on the lightning-lit
night of a furious downpour. The first deluge
in six months, it stormed
without letup

until dawn, while he drafted
his gorgeous tall oil painting of Onima, the historic First Lady
of Bonaire. Boi-Nay, the first boy-man, wheedled
God in the Sun to give him a wife. The Almighty instructed him
to hack and carve a Black Stone
Woman, and leave her bowed
in a low stoop
like an Olympic discus thrower's pre-vault.
And there stood she, blackly
aglow on rock
embankment, as a wildly glimmering night's
electric storm pulsated
opalescence
around her crouched figure,
full-bosomed and sultry, the stars teeming overhead; while above
her brow, on a flat-topped mesa, stood a long row
of tall luminous cacti, clear spaces between them . . . On the canvas,
they seem to throb and shudder

like animal tails, or individual
blooded phalluses:
one by one, those near-parallel cacti tremble
with their own inner light.
At first glance,
they appear to resemble cactus picket fences
which surround and protect
old Plantation
Estates, scattered here & there
throughout the island. But those other ranks are static legions

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of the living dead, while these furry pricklers hover
in place, a spiritual congregation of cacti standing in chorus
under an explosive starry sky.
They shriek their happy news
to the Heavens!
The birth of Boi-Nay's mate. The first woman
hunkering on the rock below.
Look, she is open
to the night's electric showers. She drinks,
drinks of the cactus outflow. . . .
O how Winfred

must have struggled to control
those bold wavery cliff lines, as well as that woman's upraised
arms and rotund shoulders. Three days of heavy rain
drove the humidity so high, the supple paint stayed damp: colors
streaked and ran. Multiple figures
of woman and cactus sentinels
kept rippling
and softening in outline, while the artist
bolstered them with primary
color source.
Winfred lost count of how many paint layers
it took to make the cactus
rinds becalmed,
no reprieve until the gush
of rain subsided. He never slept, ate or drank until the paint
dried, his vigilance needed every minute to guard
the painted shapes . . . Skies cleared. He stalked into the light
to view his cactus bride.

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# Scrutinizing Blake

**BLAKE. By Peter Ackroyd.** Alfred A. Knopf. $35.00

The explosion of critical interest in William Blake touched off by Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* in 1947 is still reverberating, though it has moved into new dimensions since then. Studies of his archetypal symbolism, explications of his metaphysical system, explorations of his political and religious thought, psychoanalytic interpretations both Freudian and Jungian, close readings of poetic texture, revaluations of his place in English painting, discussions of the "composite art" of text and design in his illuminated books, and most recently close study of his methods as a graphic artist: each approach has widened the scope of our knowledge about Blake's work and deepened our admiration for his achievement. In all this furor of critical activity only biography has lagged behind: partly because of the magnitude of the task of covering Blake's three careers as poet, painter, and engraver spread over almost seven decades, but still more because of the sketchy information about his life (1757-1827) as provided by the usual sources of letters, journals, reminiscences and so forth. Not only was his life externally quite uneventful, passed for the most part in poverty and obscurity, but he was so little regarded in his time that few records of his existence were preserved. Alexander Gilchrist's pioneering biography of 1863, however inadequate it may seem today, is still the source on which most biographers lean most heavily. But in the last few decades the work of editors, bibliographers, cataloguers and historically-minded scholars on many fronts has accumulated a critical mass of information that offers a basis for a new portrait of Blake in all his extraordinary fullness.

Peter Ackroyd, who has previously written the lives of T.S. Eliot, Thomas Chatterton, and Charles Dickens, has now risen to this challenge. His biography of Blake is the first to draw on the full range of recent scholarship, and his skillful infusion of this new material adds depth and color to the familiar outlines of Blake's life. He brings to his task the Blakean traits of energy and enthusiasm as well as an infectious identification with his subject, and his book will appeal to readers who have responded to the legend of Blake while remaining bewildered by much of his work and unacquainted with the man behind it. Blake has long had his small groups of special admirers—wealthy collectors of his paintings and illuminated books, students in the 1960's claiming him as a fellow revolutionist, even drug addicts fascinated by his hallucinatory power: Ackroyd aims at a wider, more general and more prosaic audience. He gives us a biography for the age of

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information—a mosaic of facts drawn from a wide variety of sources, interspersed with vivid descriptions of Blake's London, vignettes of his friends and patrons, and some cautious psychoanalytic speculation, all deftly assembled, generously illustrated, and narrated with brio. Ackroyd has a sharp eye for enlivening small detail: he has noted the decorations on the Grinling Gibbons font where Blake was baptized, the firmness of his signature in the marriage register, and the names of three of the seven other Londoners with whom he shares a common grave in Bunhill Fields. Yet the reader should be warned that the book contains many small inaccuracies as well as fictional touches based loosely on fact. A few small examples: Ackroyd takes us on one of Blake's boyhood rambles through the fields north of London, where he may or may not have met a maiden lady mounted on a gray mare who liked to cut small boys' kitestrings with a large pair of scissors—which may or may not have inspired his later engraving of "Aged Ignorance" clipping the wings of youthful vision. He pictures Blake the apprentice in Basire's workshop learning the messy and laborious steps of making an engraving—though what he describes is clearly an etching. He tells of "The Great Fiery Meteor" of 1783 which may or may not have inspired a later drawing by Blake's younger brother Robert that William copied in 1788 in "The Approach of Doom," his first relief etching—which Ackroyd twice labels an engraving. What is more important, the reader looking for a new understanding of Blake's work, or of the inner drama of the imagination that produced it, may well be disappointed. In the very profusion of detail which is the strength of Ackroyd's method the significant outlines of Blake's creative career tend to be lost.

The conception of Blake's career in modern criticism turns on two poles which may be described as the systematic and the historical. The first of these approaches, deriving from Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, views Blake's work (especially his poetry) as the expression of a unified unchanging view of reality expressed in terms of an original mythological system which gradually unfolds over the course of his career, self-contained and insulated from the issues of the age. The critic's task is to tease out the details of the system and their interconnections, and his goal is to achieve what Frye described as the "total intelligibility" of Blake's myth. The second approach locates Blake squarely within his period and views his work as responding to various intellectual and artistic forces of the times and reflecting significant changes in his outlook. David Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* led the way in 1954 by charting Blake's relation to the historical and political upheavals of the age, and since then other critics have explored a wide variety of contexts for his work, from the rise of the English working class to the outbreak of millenarianism in the 1790's. Their method is to accumulate as much relevant information about the

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times as possible, as well as the facts of Blake's own life and working methods, then bring them to bear on the interpretation of his work.

Ackroyd's conception of Blake looks in both these directions. He provides a wealth of information about Blake and his milieu, especially from recent sources, and from time to time he sketches in the historical background of the American and French Revolutions and the long war against Napoleon, with its political repression and the sufferings it inflicted on the London poor. Yet he hardly indicates how these events shaped Blake's lifelong hatred of the Establishment or figured in his work. He distances himself from the view of Blake's radicalism advanced by Erdman and recently elaborated in terms of intellectual and religious history by Jon Mee and E.P. Thompson. Ackroyd's lack of interest in the political context may explain the short shrift he gives to the four Continental Prophecies *America*, *Europe*, and *The Song of Los* (including "Africa" and "Asia") except to praise their magnificent illustrations. These works, which trace the growth of the idea of revolution back to the beginning of time, are Blake's first venture in writing the universal history that culminated in his last long poem *Jerusalem*, but Ackroyd views them as little more than popular narrative in an Ossianic idiom. While it may be too fanciful to see his dismissal of the continental poems as a kind of insularity, it is striking how often Ackroyd stresses Blake's Englishness and places him as a "Cockney visionary" within a line of great London artists such as Turner and Dickens. He opposes Blake's "English strain of moral seriousness and earnest spirituality" to the infection of "sceptical and deistical" ideas presumably caught from the continent, and he reads the conclusion of almost every one of Blake's poems from *Tiriel* onward as a triumph of spirituality over materialism. But this downplays the radical nature of Blake's religious thought from beginning to end (though Ackroyd associates his liberated attitude toward nakedness with his Dissenting heritage); it also oversimplifies Blake's religious development, which is the ground base of his entire career as poet and artist.

Ackroyd's claim that Blake is "the last great religious poet in England" and his stress on the formative influence of the Bible from his childhood onward link him with the critical tradition of Frye and its insistence on the centrality of the Bible and Milton in Blake's work. Yet he is not especially interested in Blake's relationship to Christianity, specifically the Dissenting background of his religious thought, which he dismisses as "of no consequence." He does not spell out the implications of Blake's antinomianism—his hatred of the Moral Law, his denial of original sin, his conviction that God exists only in individual men; and he hardly mentions Blake's defense of "sensual enjoyment," from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* onward, as the basis of spiritual freedom. Instead he describes Blake simply as "imbued with a religion of piety, enthusiasm, and vision."

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Indeed, except for his passing involvement with Swedenborgianism, Ackroyd has less to say about Blake's Christianity than his interest in mesmerism, alchemy, Freemasonry, and other contemporary forms of occultism. About Blake's own mythological system, which originated as an alternative not only to classical mythology but to Christianity itself, he provides little more than a cursory introduction to seven or eight of the main characters—Orc, Urizen, Los, and others. Central concepts such as the Divine Humanity or fourfold vision, or even such phrases as "the Hermaphroditic Satanic world of rocky destiny," are left unexplained. Blake's gradual conversion from a kind of imaginative deism to an evangelical faith in Christ as "the Friend of Sinners" and his final acceptance of Jehovah as a loving and forgiving Father go almost unnoticed. In the religious dimension as in others, Blake developed and changed; yet Ackroyd gives little sense of this evolution.

Blake's ideas on the subject of art had both religious and political implications, and here again one might question some aspects of Ackroyd's analysis. Blake's early drawings and paintings, like his early poetry, show a striking preference for historical subjects over religious ones—predominantly subjects with radical and anti-monarchical implications drawn from early British history, such as "The Making of Magna Carta" or "The Penance of Jane Shore," rather than from the classical myth and history sanctioned by Establishment taste or the traditional themes of Christian art. At the same time the style of his paintings up to about 1800 conforms for the most part to the classical modes he had learned as a student at the Royal Academy. Ackroyd, however, sees Blake as committed to a spiritualized Gothic ideal from the time of his apprentice days when he sketched the royal tombs in Westminster Abbey for his master Basire. But it is hard to find any evidence of a "spiritual revelation" in Blake's meticulous and impersonal renderings of the effigies of the Norman kings (whom he in fact despised), and Gothic motifs are almost entirely absent from his painting till about 1804. To overlook this fact dilutes the importance of the turning point in his artistic career that came in 1804, when he experienced a sudden insight that the true way to art was to be found in the austere Gothic style he had encountered years earlier in Westminster Abbey rather than in the opulence of the grand style exemplified by Sir Joshua Reynolds. This crystallized his hostility to academic painting, or what he called "Venetian and Flemish ooze," and set him on a path that led farther and farther away from contemporary acceptance.

For more specific discussion of Blake's work, Ackroyd makes good use of recent research on Blake's methods as painter and printmaker in an appreciative account of his art in general. He gives a perceptive description of the two series of Biblical paintings Blake executed for Thomas Butts,

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with his classical handling of structure, light, and color in the first and his approach to Gothic forms in the second. He provides an informed summary of the development of Blake's graphic style, from the linearity of the early engravings through the tactile exuberance of the color prints of 1795 to the tonal richness of the 1825 *Illustrations to the Book of Job*. He mentions Blake's uncomfortable relationship with the Royal Academy, though hardly suggesting the extent of his lifelong ambition to be recognized by the Academy and his bitterness at being rejected. He recounts at length the sorry story of Blake's falling out with his agent Robert Cromek and his old friend Thomas Stothard, whom he accused (unjustly, as has recently been shown) of stealing his idea for the painting of Chaucer's "Canterbury Pilgrims." Ackroyd's description of individual works, however, remains mostly on the surface: he does not really explain why, for instance, the figure of Job had such central importance in Blake's art from his 1785 drawing "The Complaint of Job" to the 1825 *Illustrations*, or how his interpretation of the story challenged the orthodox view of Job's repentance, or how it deepened over the years with his changing conception of God.

By and large Ackroyd is not as much interested in Blake's poetry as in his art. His discussion of the *Poetical Sketches*, the volume of Blake's juvenilia, is too brief and allusive to give a clear sense of the range and virtuosity of Blake's earliest poems, from Elizabethan limpidity and bardic vigor to Shakespearean heroics and Spenserian pastoralism. So also with the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*: he offers generalities about Blake's style rather than exploring the significant contrasts between the two sets—the joyous world of childhood Innocence, suffused with trust and love, counterpointed to the troubled world of Experience, of adolescent protest against the restrictions of adult authority. In two short chapters examining two of the Songs more closely, he discusses "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Innocence* largely in terms of the cruel exploitation of the hapless children sold into the trade, and relates "The Tyger" of *Experience* chiefly to real or symbolic tigers Blake might have met in menageries or in books or paintings or even in newspaper reports comparing the French revolutionaries to a "tribunal of tigers." The central question of the poem, what kind of Creator can have made such a creature, is not considered, while "The Chimney Sweeper" with its arresting and ironic conclusion "So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm," is dismissed as sanctimonious or "destructive and ignorant innocence." Blake once defended the seeming obscurity or indirection of his work because it "rouzes the faculties to act": yet Ackroyd rarely moves the reader to reflect on the deeper meaning of the samples of Blake's poetry that he quotes. In discussing the autobiographical prophecy *Milton* he makes a number of pertinent comments on Blake's lifelong sympathy with Milton, the contemporary vogue of Miltonic painting and recitation, the

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allegorical union of Blake and Milton within the poem, and so forth: but he does not confront the central message of "this long and sometimes difficult work"—Blake's climactic denunciation of the false art and false religion and false philosophy of his age and the reassertion of his prophetic mission against all challengers. His account of *Jerusalem* is more illuminating: yet it too does not define the vital core of the poem, Albion's deliverance from spiritual sickness through forgiveness and self-annihilation.

At times the multiplication of contexts in Ackroyd's discussion of Blake's work makes for a lack of direction in his narrative. With a Blakean disregard of chronology he often juxtaposes events that might better be kept separate. For example, in describing the apprentice engraving copied from a copy of a figure from Michaelangelo that Blake afterward entitled "Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion," he reads into it a wealth of significance—religious, artistic, political—that it did not take on for Blake till thirty years later. He is consistently vague about dates, which enables him to argue, for instance, that the lucidity of the "Pickering Manuscript" poems, written around 1803, proves that Blake was not suffering from any serious mental instability in 1809 or 1810. He conflates the famous 1799 exhibition of paintings belonging to the Duc d'Orléans, which inspired Blake to return to painting after an interval of fourteen years, with an earlier exhibition of 1793. He credits Blake's patron William Hayley with "genuine enthusiasm" for his art, but the record shows that Hayley never bought an original painting of Blake's or a single copy of the illuminated books. Inaccuracies such as these are usually hard to spot since Ackroyd's documentation is slight and often slipshod. For instance, the curious reader is not told where to find the two anonymous fifteenth-century engravings which Ackroyd believes Blake recalled in his illustrations to the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, or the mysterious notebook containing a translation of Sophocles' *Ajax* which Ackroyd attributes to Blake on hearsay evidence. Many of the articles from journals and collections on which he draws are not mentioned in his notes or bibliography; within the notes page references are occasionally lacking, or the names of authors or essential dates of works cited; or a wrong title may be given, or the wrong edition, or a wrong page—as when a familiar quotation from Keats's letters is referred to a non-existent page in Robert Gittings's biography.

Ackroyd's most dramatic error occurs in his account of the Gordon Riots of 1780, in which Blake took a part that most of his biographers have tried to paper over. The Riots began on June 2nd as an orderly demonstration by some sixty thousand members of the Protestant Association opposing a bill in Parliament easing restrictions on Catholics. The Government responded by delaying tactics, then arrested and committed five of the leaders to Newgate following attacks on two Catholic chapels

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(one of them on Warwick Street, four blocks from Blake's house). These arrests touched off more anti-Catholic incidents that gradually escalated into a full-blown riot by the London poor against wealth and power in general. Ackroyd's account of the "general madness" of that week owes more to Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* than to sober historical research such as that of W.E.H. Lecky or George Rudé. He pictures a drunken mob rampaging into Broad Street, Westminster on the night of June 2nd, plundering and setting fires and engaging in a pitched battle with the militia "a few yards" from Blake's own home. But Ackroyd has mistaken both the date and the place of the scene he describes, which he bases on a famous engraving by James Heath. This engraving, entitled "The Riots in Broad Street on June 7th, 1780," depicts the bloody climax of the Riots that occurred not on June 2nd but five days later on Broad Street, Holborn, over half a mile from Blake's home in Westminster, where the militia finally opened fire on the crowds. Ackroyd suggests that Blake reacted in panic to these events, producing a recurrent anxiety about and rejection of politics expressed in his later work. But this does not square either with the tone and message of Blake's work as a whole or with his action at the time. At the height of the Riots on June 6th, as reported by Gilchrist, Blake was in the front ranks of a crowd that marched on Newgate to free the five leaders and ended by sacking and burning the hated prison itself. This event, the formative political experience of his life, resonates throughout his poetry and illustrations, all the way from the images of broken chains and liberating flames in *America* to the beatific vision of "dungeons burst & the Prisoners set free" in the last chapter of *Jerusalem*.

Ackroyd's misreading of this event raises a question about his use of his sources, which tends toward the uncritical but where, given the fragmentary and often unreliable nature of the original accounts of Blake's life, a sceptical approach is required. It appears that his recounting of the riot on Broad Street is based on the biographer Michael Davis's careless reference to Heath's engraving (omitting the date) rather than on more trustworthy reports. Ackroyd also repeats, without examining their bases, the story of Blake's adolescent vision of a procession of monks in Westminster Abbey and the legend that he died "Singing of the things he Saw in Heaven." Like Gilchrist, on whom he relies heavily, he rarely names the informants he quotes, yet he refers respectfully several times to Frederick Tatham's "Life" of 1832, which of all the early memoirs was the most prone to pious exaggeration—seen most dramatically in its description of the room resounding with "the beatific Symphony" of Blake singing on his deathbed. Ackroyd mentions that Blake himself was "a wonderful fabulist," whose memories are not always to be trusted, but he does not pursue the interesting implications of his remark—that all the early accounts of Blake,

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from Malkin through Tatham to Gilchrist, need to be far more carefully scrutinized than they have been. Some years ago David Erdman exploded the most famous of these fabulations, Blake's prophetic warning to Tom Paine in 1792 that he should flee to France to escape Government pursuit; Ackroyd alludes to this as a "report" but does not actually deny it.

In the end, in the absence of significant original research or a fresh slant on existing evidence, Ackroyd has not offered a genuinely new portrait of Blake. A wealth of information, however skilfully deployed, does not quite correspond to insight, and the multifarious details of his account do not quite cohere into the compelling inner drama of Blake's life that speaks through his poetry and painting. Indeed, Ackroyd's version, highly readable though it is, seems oddly like updated Gilchrist with his picture of the visionary child, the faithful husband, the hard-working painter and mostly impenetrable poet, honest, pious, and sane. Blake the radical, the "dangerous" Blake whom the critic W.J.T. Mitchell has recently described as incoherent, obscene, and quite possibly mad, or "terrible Blake in his pride" as he once described himself, is largely overlooked. And yet, in spite of his shortcomings, Ackroyd has fashioned from the expanded store of our present knowledge of Blake a more rounded and substantial picture of Blake the man in his time than any previous biographer has done. Blake's favorite word, as the Concordance shows, was "all," and one of his earliest aphorisms was "Less than All cannot satisfy Man." Perhaps no biography can ever do justice to his complexity and inclusiveness. Nevertheless, Ackroyd has taken a large step in the right direction, and his lively and ambitious portrait should win new admiration with many readers for a very great man.

**AILEEN WARD**

## Eliot on Trial

**T.S. ELIOT, ANTI-SEMITISM, AND LITERARY FORM. By Antony Julius.** Cambridge University Press. $49.95

Antony Julius is not the first to find anti-Semitism in Eliot's poetry and prose. Early readers of Eliot's work perceived, explained, discounted it in various ways. Empson and Orwell, for example, saw it as a garden variety anti-Semitism, not to be taken very seriously. Orwell remarked: "Who didn't say such things at the time," the time being *before* knowledge of the Nazi Holocaust, but after the knowledge of a long history of persecution

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and pogroms. Others have insisted that the anti-Semitism is peripheral to Eliot's main achievement, or, in the poems at least, not the expression of the poet's sentiments, but rather of dramatis personae. In *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* Christopher Ricks (who takes the issue of anti-Semitism in Eliot seriously) argues that the lines "And the jew squats on the window sill, the owner, / Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp, / Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London." belong to the narrator of "Gerontion," not the poet, while acknowledging that the lines, "The rats are underneath the piles. / The jew is under the lot. / Money in Furs" in "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" are Eliot's responsibility. The narrator of "Gerontion" admits to "thoughts of a dry season." Does the apparent self-condemnation of the narrator exculpate the poet? It could be argued that Eliot identified himself with the mind of the narrator without self-congratulation. But it could also be argued that self-condemnation or self-irony may provide a license to express deeply felt sentiments. (When Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* speaks of "open[ing] the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri," he may mean to disarm the reader with the charm of self-irony, but he does not escape the charge of coldness.) In "Burbank" anti-Semitism egregiously pervades the poem and, we may assume, reflects the sentiments of the poet. We may also conclude that a poet who writes "Burbank" in his own voice can identify himself with the narrator of "Gerontion."

Julius's distinctive contribution is his insistence on the centrality of anti-Semitism to Eliot's achievement. He resists every attempt to bracket and discount it as irrelevant to the power of the work. George Steiner speaks of "uglier touches [that] tend to occur at the heart of very good poetry." For Julius the lines are not touches, but infections. "'Burbank . . .' is certainly infected throughout, the jew conceived as 'protozoic slime.'" The persuaded reader should come away from the book believing that anti-Semitism is Eliot's muse.

Is the evidence of the poetry sufficient to sustain Julius's claim? A lawyer by profession, Julius employs a prosecutorial strategy. For instance, he focuses on a line that disparages the Jew, "Rachel née Rabinovich, / tears at the grapes with murderous paws;" in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" and accumulates around it all the associated anti-Semitic passages by other writers that he can summon up: Bram Dijkstra (*Idols of Perversity*) in which "Rachel is a predatory Jewish woman (or 'Jewess,' which evokes 'tigress')," Edouard-Adolphe Drumont for whom the actress Rachel is "a little Bohemian tigress, a lascivious Jewess" and Charles Maurras, of the notorious *Action Française*, who wrote of a Semitic witch who "did harm by evil magic, withdrew her spells and cast them again . . .

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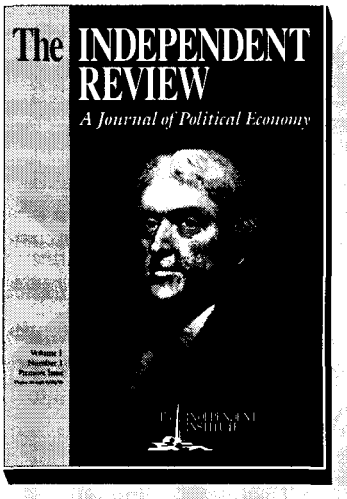


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the thick smoke of her lair, the pernicious fever present in the heavy air added to the effect of the incantations which she chanted from the depth of her throat. She agitated men's hearts." And there are other passages of a similar kind by Maupassant, Baudelaire and Pound. In citing the anti-Semitism of others, Julius means to show not only the possible sources of Eliot's anti-Semitism, but also its existence as "a component of our culture." The effect of the piling on of these statements of other writers is, oddly enough, to contradict what Julius characterizes as "the charged economy of Eliot's anti-Semitism." Julius's associating Eliot with the statements of others creates the impression of the body of Eliot's work as fatally diseased. Julius here behaves not as a literary critic who respects the compression of Eliot's poetic line, but as a lawyer standing before a jury, having to prove not only the existence of the crime, but also its enormity. The case against Eliot gains its force by the affinity Eliot's lines have with the even more monstrous assertions by others.

Julius uses the same technique in illustrating the stereotypic association of the Jew with uncleanliness. He refers briefly to the excremental Jew in "Sweeney" without the confirmation of quotation, but all the truly vile instances are drawn from other writers: Kipling, Wyndham Lewis, Louis Farrakhan and the vilest of all, Drumont, who writes "Now that [the Jews] are our masters, they vomit on us all excrement swallowed by Ezekiel." Julius wants to dissipate any sentiment of marginal or harmless anti-Semitism in Eliot's work, the kind encountered, for instance, in polite upper class circles.

The issue is not whether Eliot harbored anti-Semitic feelings but what a critic (in this case Antony Julius) makes of it. Julius himself announces at the beginning of his book that there are degrees of anti-Semitism. "Anti-Semites are not all the same. Some break bones, others wound Jewish sensibilities. Eliot falls into the second category." The effect of Julius's indictment of Eliot, however, is to dissolve the distinction, because he wants a verdict of guilty and like any good lawyer he will make the case for his side of the argument as fully and as forcefully as possible.

But legal prosecution or defense should not be a model for a literary criticism. Criticism should allow a work to make its claim on the reader, before it passes judgment, respecting its complexity without being committed to a particular outcome. Disinterestedness was Arnold's word for it, a word of judiciousness rather than prosecution or defense. In Eliot's case, it should begin with the acknowledgment of the presence of anti-Semitism without offering excuses for it. There is ample evidence for it ("Burbank with a Badaeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," "A Cooking Egg," "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," "Gerontion" and the prose work *After Strange Gods*). It is indefensible to justify the anti-Semitic sentiments by the remark (made by Orwell) "who didn't say such things at the time."

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The time, after all, is the twentieth century, not the time of the crusades, and there were many people who did not say such things. And even if these anti-Semitic sentiments were widespread, it shows a failure of imagination and humanity not to be forgiven in a poet with a claim to greatness.

There is evidence from Julius's own account that Eliot not only resisted the more virulent expressions of anti-Semitism, he seemed at times to struggle with his own expression of it. In a separate chapter, Julius tries to show that every effort on Eliot's part to make amends like changing "jew" to "Jew" in "Gerontion" or suppressing the republication of *After Strange Gods* falls short of genuine remorse. Motives, of course, are always difficult to ascertain, but Julius is bent upon denying Eliot any exculpatory motive. Here is an example. In 1940 Eliot approved of the Pope's decision to interdict the *Action Française* newspaper (the organ of the antisemite Charles Maurras). Speculating about the Pope's motives, he wondered whether the Pope was "condemning a dangerous intolerance which classified Jews, Protestants and Freemasons in one comprehensive condemnation," Julius asks "why 'dangerous'? And to whom?" And he answers: "Apparently for the odd reason that this intolerance makes an error of classification. It rejects all three—Jews, Protestants, and Freemasons—without discrimination. Would an intolerance that condemned Protestants, but not Jews or Freemasons be less dangerous?" Eliot's statement invites such a question. But he or a surrogate should be allowed an answer. Instead Julius provides an answer that discredits Eliot. Julius simply believes that Eliot's anti-Semitism is intractable.

The prosecutorial animus extends beyond the theme of anti-Semitism to Eliot's politics. Julius finds anti-Semitism in Eliot's advocacy of a Christian society and suspicion of the effect of free thinking Jews in it. (It is unclear how Eliot would have regarded the presence of the religious Jew.) Eliot's conservatism and anti-Semitism seem to go hand in hand for Julius. But what of conservatism in its classic formulation? "The vituperative caricature of liberalism [in Eliot] has its origin in the counter-revolutionary polemics of Burke and de Maistre." There is surely a significant difference between Burke and the reactionary and anti-Semitic de Maistre. Julius's antipathy to conservative thought is so strong that he simply dismisses the socialist Raymond Williams's thoughtful praise of Eliot for "exposing the limitations of an 'orthodox' liberalism which has all too generally and too complacently accepted." Julius's failure to consider Eliot's reflections on cultural diversity in *Notes Toward A Definition of Culture* reflects a lack of critical objectivity.

Most puzzling in the book is Julius's profession of admiration for Eliot. If Eliot is what Julius makes him out to be, what does he mean in his conclusion by describing his work as one of resistance and respect? "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" What is there to respect in Julius's

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version of Eliot? He is impressed with Eliot's gift for poetic compression, his capacity for making an art of anti-Semitism. Has Julius succumbed, despite the vigor of his attack, to what Primo Levi in a quite different context characterizes as "the lechery of aestheticism." Julius's regard for Eliot makes the reader question the moral indignation that animates the book. Whether or not you believe Julius's account, the logic of his exposition is that Eliot must be condemned and rejected. Perhaps the gesture of respect at the end reflects a realization that he has gone too far.

Genius does not exempt a poet from scrutiny of the moral and political character of his work, but it requires a less tendentious judgment than the one Julius provides.

**EUGENE GOODHEART**

## Possessed By Love

**Love, Again. By Doris Lessing**. HarperCollins. $24.00

The title of Doris Lessing's latest novel refers, most apparently, to her heroine's reluctant re-experience of emotions she had thought, at sixty-five, to have put well behind her. Sarah Durham finds that she can still burn with desire, writhe with sexual jealousy, grieve at love's frustration—and no less than when she was young. She is not ready for the acquiescence of Colette's Léa who lets herself go gently into loveless age in *The Last of Chéri*. The title also refers, I think, to Lessing's latest novel itself as *novel*, that literary form which includes so much besides a love story but often seems to express the whole of human destiny by means of a "romance"—a word with cognates in other languages (German or French *Roman*) that mean what we do by the word "novel." Novelists must, it seems, always write about love, however much other subjects, other kinds of human experience, claim their primacy. Yet, after all her own efforts in previous books to show how sexual passion is woven into the web of social experiences, Lessing submits in her latest to the tunnel vision of the love-possessed. She has laid aside her habitual concern—in nearly twenty long fictions—to find a total vision of human history through either realist chronicle or prophetic fantasy.

Sarah Durham's very time of life puts her beyond the struggles of youth and early maturity when sex involves the challenges of marriage and

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parenthood and vocational self-definition. It is not surprising that she is not engaged, as earlier Lessing heroines in *The Grass is Singing*, *The Golden Notebook*, the "Martha Quest" series, and others of her novels were, by issues of race, politics, or the social experience of gender. She has been a widow for thirty years and has not taken a lover for—perhaps—twenty. Her children are grown up and distant on other continents. She visits her mother in the country a few times a year, but there is no real communication there. Her only familial connection close at hand in London is a brother, Hal, whom she has never liked and sees as little as possible. There is also a niece, his dysfunctional daughter, who clings to Sarah for comfort when she returns from her forays into the drug world—but this relation is more annoyance than attachment, and she has pretty nearly cast it off. As for vocation—twenty years ago she had a rough time earning her living in various ways, but for a long time now she has enjoyed her role as a playwright and the manager of a respected small theater company. Sarah's best support comes from the habit of work and the friendship of the theatrical colleagues with whom she has been united for years. Yet the question, "What now, what next?" turns out to concern the survival of a capacity to experience the *coup de foudre*, the lightning bolt of love—to lose one's head over some desirable other, whatever good sense counsels. After years of placid celibacy she is precipitated not once but twice into the brief madness of erotic obsession.

Like the story of Anna Wulf, the protagonist of *The Golden Notebook*, Sarah's experience is doubled by that of an imagined woman about whom she is writing. But whereas Ella, the heroine of Anna's novel, is of Anna's own time and condition, Sarah brings to the stage of her theater a romantic episode of the last century. Her subject is a woman whose life had been utterly unlike her own. Julie Vairon was the beautiful and gifted daughter of a French plantation owner and his mulatto mistress on the island of Martinique. She fell in love with an army officer who took her with him back to France; she lost him to a wife chosen by his family, and fell again even more deeply in love with a young aristocrat in the neighborhood. He, too, was unable to marry her—and she stayed on, a hermit in the woods, earning her living by tutoring, writing music, painting, and keeping an extraordinary journal. She was still young and beautiful when an amiable master printer wanted to marry her. On the brink of this conventional closure to a nineteenth-century novel, she drowned herself, leaving no explanatory note behind. Now, three-quarters of a century later, her music is rediscovered and performed, her journals are published, and she has become a cult figure.

When a play about her is proposed, the members of Sarah's theater team chant, dismissively, at first, "She was poor but she was honest,victim of a rich

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man's whim"—and see only platitude. But Sarah discovers in Julie not a banal female martyr but one who chose, though choosing to die seems hardly a very original gesture. We must take the fascination of the Julie legend as a given— for everyone in the novel soon feels it. To the reader, it must be said, Julie Vairon's character seems insubstantial. One may wonder not merely, as Sarah does, whether she might have met Cézanne in Provence, but also how she felt about many other things besides new ways of painting. As she dreamed in her cabin in the woods had this Hester Prynne never a thought about the social world that punished her for loving too romantically? Lessing provides no suggestion that Julie's journals expressed anything besides love and its pangs. She does not choose to burden her image with the ideological baggage that once weighed down her former heroines or with responses to the realities that had shaped such a heroine's short life—the class society of her day, its view of women, her own mixed racial origins and the society of her colonial birthplace. When, after Sarah's play has had its success, a "Miss Saigon" musical version proves even more generally successful. One is supposed to wince—but the original tale, as far as one can tell, is not so far removed from its sentimental reduction.

The fascination of Julie's story is felt powerfully, nevertheless, not only by Sarah but by Stephen, the show's "angel," who has literally fallen in love with the dead. To him, Julie is the ideal love object not to be hoped for in his settled life—as a rich country gentleman and philanthropist, a father and husband (his wife a good friend, though a lesbian). His strange devotion may be a sign of the mental breakdown which leads, finally, to his suicide—or else something visionary, even supernatural, a subjection to the powers of the not-so vanished past from which a ghost can emerge to become a succubus. There is, in any case, no question of his offering love to Sarah—or of her finding herself in love with him—though they are drawn close by the subject upon which they collaborate in creating the play of *Julie Vairon*. Rather, he is a sort of brother, such a brother as Sarah has missed. His impossible dream of love is a bizarre exaggeration of the fatality of love mania—and a caution to Sarah.

As the play shapes itself in rehearsal, the Julie story distills a sweet poison. Sarah cannot resist the flirtatious attentions of Bill, the handsome young actor who plays the part of Julie's first lover; she suspects his sincerity (he turns out to be homosexual) yet she is overcome by his golden youth, his perfect looks, his pleading charm. Recovering, she succumbs to the affectionate dependence of Henry, her young American director who returns her feelings but remains faithful to his wife. Through no restraint of her own, she remains the celibate aging person she was at the start of her ordeal; although a third young man, Andrew, who plays Julie's second lover, offers himself unconditionally, he is simply invisible to her.

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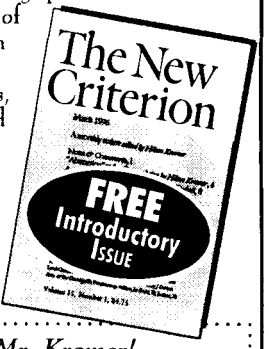


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Novels, these days, seldom omit the obligatory scene of sexual coupling but Lessing—who always before this has allowed her women time in bed—keeps Sarah chaste, though aching for her Julie's raptures. The ultimate irony of Lessing's title is that reciprocated love does not, in fact, happen again for this victim of the love god. Though she is still what Stephen calls a "love woman," Sarah must painfully pluck his dart out of her own breast. The process of recovery from her unfulfilled love for Henry is long and painful and occupies many of the novel's final pages.

The action of Lessing's story moves first from London to Provence, where, in the very village where Julie Vairon had played out her real drama long before, Sarah and Stephen's play, set to Julie's own music, opens for a spectacular first showing. The ironies of popularization are already present in the touristic fanfare of the Julie Vairon festival, built around the story of this outcast for whom two new hotels are now named. The time will later come when "Julie" will be a pop song throughout the world. But, in the midsummer's-night's-dream atmosphere of theater illusion and the exotic surroundings of the Midi, Sarah's fevered feelings gain plausibility.

The narrative, which flows continuously from first to last page without chapter breaks, pursues a helical course, each rehearsal or performance of the play occasioning new reference to some part of the Julie story, new reflections on the puzzle of human love. Even Stephen finds dream and reality indistinguishable when he falls in love, briefly, with the actress who plays Julie while the actress, herself, is merged with her own role and in love with the actor who plays Julie's lover—just as Sarah is. Then, *Julie Vairon* is put on again, with a change of cast, for a run in England with rehearsals in London and an opening at Stephen's Oxfordshire estate. The new Julie is in love with Stephen while Sarah's fixation on Henry, who responds yet withdraws, continues. More and more it is obvious that, as one often says, Sarah is "in love with love." "The sufferings she was going through obviously had nothing to do with Bill, or Henry. People carry around with them this weight of longing, usually, thank heavens, well out of sight and 'latent'—like an internal bruise—and then, for no obvious reasons, just like that, there he was (who?), and onto him is projected the longing, with love." But her agonies pose immemorial questions. Why, when one is old, does one still love, and love youth more than anything? Is it a matter of persisting physical desire merely, or a narcissism that seeks a renovated selfhood in the other, or the recrudescence of old insecurities, the craving for a love denied in childhood, denied even at one's mother's breast? Are Sarah's belated infatuations "little inflammations" or the grand passion come at last and too late?

This old sweet song at twilight turns out to be no "love story"—and hardly a story at all. Lessing's practiced art depicts, vivaciously, just the

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same, the variegated character-types of a theater company. She makes an effective drama of the progress of a dramatic production and the ardor and tension among the cast and crew that vanishes as soon as the set is "struck" for the last time. Those on the margin are, from moment to moment, scenically present—like the French mayor who sponsors the Julie Vairon festival or the wealthy American backer who seems to find his own romantic release in an artistic venture, the cast members who play the supporting parts, and the three who with Sarah make up the "Founding Four" of the production team—her manager, scenic designer, and publicity woman. Though Sarah herself and the mysterious, unhappy Stephen acquire a certain tragic pathos, other characters can have a comic vivacity—like the pompous, selfish Hal and his family or even her final love, the American Henry, seen, with comic condescension, along with his managing wife and undisciplined child. Each of these, as Sarah and the novelist reflect, has his or her own story which is not the present subject. "How little do we know about what goes on inside our nearest friends, let alone agreeable acquaintances," rightly reflects Sarah—and in these subsidiary personalities the novelist's own sense of the variousness of experience is suggested and scene succeeds scene with a theatricality of its own. But nothing much actually happens to Sarah though we nearly drown in the brine of her anguish into which we are thrust much of the time. Her private thoughts and her conversations with her emotional confrère, Stephen, don't move her out of her condition but are, instead, awash with references to the great philosopher-novelists who have depicted love—Proust, Stendhal, Goethe, and others—and Bartlett quotations from the great poets. Lessing adds fictional quotations to match these from the fictional journals of the Julie who had, in her time, also reflected on her feelings.

Yet Lessing seems to have wanted to supply some final epiphany. She has let us suspect that Sarah's young almost-lovers had each been in love with their mothers and are, consequently, attracted to older women. And Lessing rummages out a motive for Sarah in the storehouse of psychoanalytic theory when, alone in a London park, she witnesses a mother whose brutal exhibition of preference for one of her children awakens a suppressed memory. That is what started it all, then! That is the source of her unquenchable craving. She—Sarah—had been the rebuffed and unloved one and her brother their mother's darling. When she had stabbed one of her dolls with scissors, as she remembered, it was her baby brother she wanted to kill. At last we see the reason for the subplot presence in the book of the unsympathetic brother. Too Freudianly pat, one is inclined to say, and too reductive of the novel's yearning for some high meaning in the passion pondered by so many since Plato wrote of it. But Lessing, the practical novelist, has resolved to conclude and to explain, as the novel

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must—and her epiphany will serve to put a stop to an interminable discussion.

And yet, this novel which is, at times, more lyric than novel, may rightly be taken as a moving exploration—perhaps a self-exploration, for its author. In *The Golden Notebook*, Anna Wulf may have spoken for Lessing when she said that the only kind of novel which interested her was one "powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order," and credited herself with one necessary quality to that end, her curiosity about life. Lessing's strongest books have expressed her unquenchable curiosity—from the early *The Grass is Singing*, which dealt with racial conflict in the Rhodesia of her youth to her relatively recent *The Good Terrorist*, which imaginatively analyzes the soul of contemporary terrorism in advanced societies. But this admirable and ambitious writer has, for a moment, anyhow, possibly wearied of her long preoccupation with the largest themes and cast aside the taste for prophecy expressed in her fiction about other worlds and the human future. And should she not be allowed a moment to muse—in her first novel after a silence of eight years—about a human experience that happens again and yet again in all times and places?

**MILLICENT BELL**

## Henry Roth: An Interim Report

**FROM BONDAGE. By Henry Roth.** New York: St. Martin's Press $25.95.

Because *From Bondage* is the third volume of a projected six-volume tome entitled *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, those who have been following the *Bildungsroman* of Ira Stigman, Roth's protagonist-alter ego, are justified in wondering just how important these books are likely to be. That they exist at all is something of a miracle, not only because Roth's writing block has become the stuff of legend (he had not published anything of size, much less of significance, since his monumental achievement, *Call It Sleep*, in 1934), but also because he produced this torrent of pages in his late eighties.

That *Call It Sleep* has been fully absorbed into the canon of twentieth-century American literature is now beyond dispute, and the novel will remain a classic so long as there are readers who care about the imagination and the shape-and-ring of individual paragraphs. For what Roth's portrait of David Schearl, an immigrant Jewish boy caught between the

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surface and symbol of New York's lower East Side, unleashed was a psychic intensity and a lyrical stream of consciousness that put Freud and Joyce squarely on native American ground.

But when it became clear that one could resurrect a nearly-forgotten novel more easily than its aging author, I was hardly alone in concluding that *Call It Sleep* contained everything Roth had to say about his psychologically battered childhood—and, in the process, nearly everything worthy of note about the immigrant Jewish experience. I was, of course, dead wrong, just as many critics were wrong when they concluded that Roth had fallen silent after his effort to write a conventionally proletarian novel failed. Just recently we learned that Roth's literary executor (Manhattan attorney Larry Fox) found seventy-five thick file folders containing thirty-five hundred pages of journal entries, finished stories, letters, and sketches among Roth's effects. So much for the apocryphal, much-repeated story that he burned his papers in a bonfire during the late 1940s, when the nagging pain of writer's block could no longer be borne.

Indeed, what we have with Roth is the case of legend piled atop legend, each presenting, at best, a partial truth. Sorting out the various "Henry Roths" will keep literary scholars and critics (to say nothing of a future biographer) busy well into the next century. Meanwhile, what we have before us are the first volumes of *Mercy of a Rude Stream*, a work that not only means to alternate between an elderly narrator (who seems in attitude and essential detail to be Roth himself) and a fictionalized protagonist, but also the larger patterns of Jewish-American assimilation from the 1920s onward.

*Mercy of a Rude Stream*'s essential techniques were set forth in *A Star Shines over Mt. Morris Park,* an installment that introduces us to memories of those times, those places as recollected in the concentrated intensity of advanced age. Setting, character, and incident are thus summoned back to life by an act of sheer narrative will as the corrosive forces of history join hands with those of guilt-ridden memory:

> Midsummer. The three incidents would always be associated in his mind, more durably, more prominently than anything else during that summer of 1914, his first summer in Harlem. How remarkable, too, that the coming of Mom's kin, the move to Harlem, and the ominous summer of 1914 should all have coincided—as if all his being and ways were undermined by the force of history disguised in the simple fact of the accession of new relatives. A thousand times he would think vainly: If it had only happened a few years later. Everything else could be the same, the war, the new relatives; if only he could have had, could have lived a few more years on the Lower East Side, say, until his Bar Mitzvah.

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If, as Irving Howe liked to argue, *dis*continuity is the central theme of Jewish history, then "dislocation" is surely Roth's defining preoccupation—for his family's exodus from the nurturing ethos of the lower East Side left him with a series of "what ifs" that a lifetime of brooding could not completely answer.

Roth's elderly persona addresses these ruminations and a good many others—about literary traditions and the individual artist; the fate of Israel in an increasingly embattled Middle East; how and why his adult life became a monument of aesthetic ruin—to a personal computer, the mechanical device that makes writing possible for the arthritic Roth, and even more important, that acts as a sounding board for his most intimate thoughts. That he dubs the machine "Ecclesias" (in roughly the same way people once referred to their automobiles as "Betsy") suggests at once a playful, even self-mocking intimacy and a more serious recognition that the Biblical echoes of Ecclesiastes are surely at work—as reminders of the old man who is Koheleth, and the vanity that is his abiding subject. Thus, it is to Ecclesias, his *m'aivtate* (Italian for "friend," and used to suggest Dante's term for Vergil), that Roth's narrator confesses all the welter of emotion and memory which "should have gone into a novel, several novels perhaps, written in early manhood, after his first—and only—work of fiction." To which Ecclesias—here given embodiment as hectoring muse rather than mere machine—replies, "Well, salvage whatever you can, threadbare mementos glimmering in recollection."

Unfortunately, few moments in the first three volumes of *Mercy* contain the shimmer that Ecclesias—and Roth—had hoped for. I say this reluctantly, even sadly, but there it is: the thick slabs of sociological detail Roth serves up as a young Ira muses about the Great War and Prohibition, baseball games at Yankee stadium or early years at City College, lack the almost unbearable lyrical intensity that made *Call It Sleep* so extraordinary. By contrast, the prose of these novels often sinks under its own weight, resembling nothing so much as a can of flat soda.

But if the ongoing chronology of how Ira Stigman moved through and past his immigrant roots (Volume VI, I am told, will end with the narrator meeting "M__" [read: Muriel Parker Roth] at an artist's colony in 1938) is problematic, the elderly Stigman who interrupts the narrative flow is unfailingly interesting. Here, for example, is what he has to say about his memories of seeing a film version of the golem legend (a Yiddish rendering of the Frankenstein story) and watching, transfixed, as the rabbi snatched "the little plug" from the golem's bosom and the "lumpish, sentient giant . . . toppled backward to the ground":

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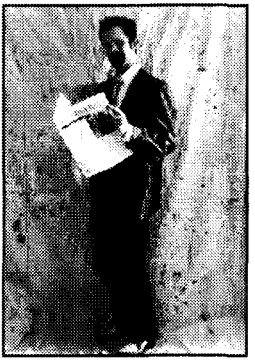

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> The plug became symbolic over the years, but of what, Ira was never sure: essence, crystal of life's principle, a vestige of 1920. . . . No, there was something else, Ira leaned backward into the sway of office chair—something else: his Jewishness, wasn't it? That he had to deal with afterward, in serious vein, not as humorous counters, something, the little he knew, the essential plug he had retained of his Jewishness, of Jewish tradition. Odd. And when he tried to pluck it out . . . creative inanition followed.

In *Call It Sleep*, David Schearl's inclination toward Jewish mysticism—however much it may strain credulity—is fully dramatized rather than so painstakingly explained; and therein lies the essential difference between the novel Roth published in 1934 and its counterparts some sixty years later. In the shopworn Jamesian formulation, Roth "tells" precisely when he should *show*.

Still, the tension between Ira Stigman's wide-eyed account of his literary education and the elderly Stigman's disavowal of the modernism at its core makes for fascinating reading; more importantly, it will surely alter how we talk about *Call it Sleep*. For Roth ultimately came to blame the high modernists (and in particular, James Joyce) for the long creative drought that was his life:

> When the revolt against the parochial world succeeded, and the individual, say a writer, casts off the restrictions that were part and parcel of his formative milieu, he simultaneously abandoned his richest, most plangent creative source: his folk, their folkways, his earliest most vivid expression, the very elements of his formulation.

With certain modifications of emphasis or tone, a great many contemporary Jewish-American writers have come to essentially the same conclusion—albeit, without the decades of smoldering resentment, internal pain, and, let me simply say it, the pure genius that Henry Roth packed into *Mercy of a Rude Stream*. Granted, an interim report can, of course, only be that: tentative, perhaps overly cautious, ultimately out to hedge its bets. But even so, after turning nearly thirteen hundred pages, some of them as shocking in their descriptions of incest as anything to be found in the "other" Roth, I think it fair to predict that critics will ignore this epical work at their peril, for this sprawling, wildly uneven, ultimately crucial work is not only the book of Henry Roth's life, but also of ours.

**SANFORD PINSKER**

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# Two at the Gap: Jorie Graham and Susan Howe

**THE DREAM OF THE UNIFIED FIELD: SELECTED POEMS 1974-1994. By Jorie Graham**. Ecco Press. $23.00
**FRAME STRUCTURES: EARLY POEMS 1974-1979. By Susan Howe.** New Directions. $12.95

A dramatic poetics, which holds back from statement and assessment to explore mood and its makings, may grow expansive. With Jorie Graham's pursuit of just such expansiveness over two decades, which appreciative readers call "metaphysical," we may follow something in transit between opposites in recent literary taste. These opposites are an organic, unified natural object—which optimistic Romanticism has long since nurtured, but which Modernism curiously favored also—and the disruptive object of postmodern Romanticism, say in Heidegger and de Man. From the Aeolian harp and the plum in the icebox to the *Ding an sich* with a depth charge. Graham's route between these enlarges on Eliot's, tracing a sensibility that would close the gap of presumed dissociation, while also embracing gestures from Hopkins to Beckett. The poetry that results grows expansive yet also remains sceptical, in harmony with a broadly shared anxiety about interpretive connection now common in the educated class. She is anxious about meaning and disaffected from narrative that moves along a line and submits to perspective; it is the mood more than the argument of scepticism that she renders. While Graham's subjects, sensuous feeling for the mind's turnings, range, and her gift for the striking phrase are very impressive, I am most struck by her frustration, which raises what I take to be tough questions, and by her barely veiled despair.

Of that despair, at moments, her poems speak candidly. She seems to tell us: do not look to me for a sense of reality, but only for that sense which achingly stands in its place, the feeling that reality is seeping away with explicit clickings and tickings, in a torture of "the minutes," "the days." The negative wonder of nihilistic time pulls at her; she invokes Beckett as her ally in agony. But as if to compensate for that feeling, she accelerates history in fast-forward rushes (notably in "What is Called Thinking," with its title from Heidegger). I believe that neither she nor her audience notices the paradox in which this involves her. The thrill gained by speeding up time is close cousin to the delirium of stasis; a swift stream may also seem to stand still. For all its strenuous trackings of awareness, and its tone of heroic perseverance against long odds, Graham's art is one of submission, bound to a Bergsonian raft in the flood of duration.

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The warm reception accorded to Graham suggests that the educated mind now sees its own stance mirrored in this poetry's large motions, suspended in gap and delay (the terms are Graham's own). Frequently she punctuates her work with manneristic cracks at conventions for framing meanings. Yet these cracks alternate with elegies for those same conventions, because she can equip her longing for substance with no new kit. The neat clicking-shut is Graham's usual caricature of older practice, but constantly she tips the wink about other conventions. She inserts schematic blanks into her phrases. She resorts to phenomenological style and tone, "tugging the wanting-to-finish out." An arch coyness flowers: "(can you understand this?) / (what will you do next?) (— feel it beginning?)." Trust attaches only to the stage before utterance and to the probe just after launch. In only three of the poems chosen here does Graham push through consentingly to the limited. Whether as metaphysical reservation or strenuous sentiment, Graham's main theme becomes hanging-back, and romantic phenomenology its style.

All this seems honest to her audience. For them, as sophisticated readers, hierarchy and finality have long since passed away. Her style shows Graham self-aware that her own conventions mix loveliness with longueurs of emotion and phrasal tics. Pause button, slow-motion lever, and echoes from current discources guide the mix, which suggests that she prefers being confirmed in a spiritual impasse towards which it is easier to gesture than to walk. It is not out of place to remember by way of contrast Eugenio Montale's gap or enigmatic *varco*. It was over in a flash; in its fulgurous light a certain degree of reality reared up and vanished. Not so here.

Her best writing makes the best, sensuously and thoughtfully, of common motives for swerving from threadbare procedures. In that vein, "Self-Portrait as Hurry and Delay [Penelope]" and "Self-Portrait as the Gesture Between Them [Adam and Eve]" stand out. But if one studies delay one risks adhering to the primal opposites of early feeling. "The Age of Reason," argued through Werner Herzog's version of *Woyzeck,* arrives at an insatiable appetite for devouring the sensory world. The later "Fission," in response to JFK's murder, resists initiation into political tragedy by rhyming that tragedy with sexual violation. That resistance leads to carefully rendered shock, but not to what lies beyond the darkness. Far more than Graham's sensuousness suggests, these primordial emotions in her work, insatiability and immobility, are at odds with themselves, setting up an impasse. The poems that stand free of it—such as the recent "The Visible World"—are exceptional.

Graham has found language for a complex mood that many people recognize and are tempted to celebrate—a mood both primordial and shuttling, at times melodramatic, at times langorous. Thus her "howling and biting gap" versus "the opening trembling, the nothing, the nothing

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with use in it trembling." While voids can be generative, the shuttle flights through them may simply stay on schedule.

Beyond delay and gap, through what I call the gaping analogy, Graham has arranged a rhetoric for her impasse. Its long loops are meant not to snare. A trick lasso designed to keep the eye traveling across the wide contours of a similitude, it slides off its target in devout near-miss practice. It frames whole poems: "Imperialism," "From the New World," "Holy Shroud," "Noli Me Tangere," "Breakdancing," and "What the End is For." This gaping analogy, and a frequent diction of rips and tears, express unease, for Graham dreads the very delays that she courts because they accumulate a charge of spiritual violence. In "What is Called Thinking" she sees this, ending with a self-corrective turn; she lets imagined violence rebound on herself, and so accepts the history and fated identity she elsewhere resists. Yet later in "Relativity: A Quartet," in whose last section a maniac shoots up a subway car, violence erupts through sheer impedence of the desire for meaning dwelt on in earlier sections during the prolonged dead stop of a passenger train. Graham's arrested scannings of natural fact, social decay, and metaphysical opacity, as if condensed from her entire oeuvre, reach the stasis that her delays elsewhere approximate. And once fully balked they explode. One poem's Hopkinsian phrase gets it: "stillness reveals / an appall of pure form."

The title poem movingly stages a reflection focussed on mother, daughter, and dance that ventures a subtle answer to her chief themes. And the first part of "Chaos [Eve]" parallels this feminine drama; fantasy unveils the created world by submitting it to a flaying, alluding to Michelangelo's self-portrait in his Last Judgment (the face of the flayed St. Bartholomew). What she peels back here, mythically, is the male artist's heroism. This leads me to account for the rips and tears of Graham's diction, again, in primordial terms; they aim at a specifically feminine world-separation. That aim not only shapes single poems but also her work as a whole which fights shy of rigid inscription. But the aim will seem effective only if one also identifies with that drama.

Not that Susan Howe leaves inscription in place: far from it. While she must be included among the breakers of language (and I mean that as no fashionable compliment), she stands out among them for sensing how much the *fractio panis* costs, with an awareness nearly as large as that for her themes. Authority, whether in language or social order, is her abiding theme; its corrosions, therefore, however fascinating and experimental, her own experimentalism always resists in the end. The veiled reality of inarticulate experience is one of these, not only among those whose reports have suffered blackout or intricate self-erasure, but also in American history at large. Her early awareness during the cataclysm of World War II shaped her sense of recent history as verging on the unspeakable. She looks

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at the supernova not directly, but to one side of it, as a way of apprehending the blast. Thus, her gleaning of things from the archives. Charles Bernstein in *A Poetics* addresses the effects of the Second World War on several poetic styles, accounting for them as delayed reactions to collective trauma. Howe's poetry, however narrow and tensile its range, amplifies those reactions. Her work excites interest among those who know that recent hermeneutic talk is a graveyard euphemism—that phrases such as "the play of the signifier" shroud cold crimes, one of which is an inadequate relation of feeling to collective trauma. Though she is as smart as the hermeneuts, Howe is also no stranger to stammers and ghostly visitations, working with them from the outset and recovering their tremors in one great antecedent, Dickinson with her "words grown odd" (in Winters' phrase). While I often do not follow Howe, always I sense her aim and her blends of civic with feminine feeling, and of strength with fragility.

"Frame Structures," the memoir-essay that introduces Howe's collected early poems (*Hinge Picture*, *Chanting at the Crystal Sea*, *Cabbage Gardens*, and *Secret History of the Dividing Line*), weaves together family histories, earlier national and northeastern regional histories, gritty economic practices, and literary affiliations. Cannily constructed, and associative in method, it touches on collective destiny, as in the linked treatments of fire throughout the piece, climaxed by her description of Fanny Longfellow's death. But the sections also allude to Duchamp's sense of design ("Delay in Glass," "Mirror Axis"). Howe came to poetry through the visual arts, and her construction is both architectonic and associative. In this respect "Frame Structures" distills her poetics. It also stands out as one of those few memoirs that quicken one's sense of historical mystery (much as do Marguerite Yourcenar's).

As preface to the early books this piece has a shorter antecedent in "There Are Not Leaves Enough to Crown to Cover to Crown to Cover," which prefaces *The Europe of Trusts* (1990), a collection of three books (*The Liberties*, *Pythagorean Silence*, and *Defenestration of Prague*). Both essays acknowledge the indirect effects of Word War II on her poetry. In 1990 Howe wrote: "fright is formed by what we see not by what they say." She guesses that this omitted but witnessable realm "dictates," in her own work, "the sound of what is thought." This claim is her most important one. Even her resonant epigrams only point to what whole poems or books sound out. From a later volume: "Voracious coinage at the confines // political acres of prey and chirrup / Confusion // of lines bisecting shred / after shred of feeling."

The gaps in that epigram function as stutter (Howe's own term in an interview). I suspect that Howe's intensity and her non-doctrinaire feminism are only two motives for gapping. A deeper motive is her complex

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relation to authority, and therefore to linguistic stability. Her art moves between being captured and breaking free (her own terms again); such an oscillation equips her to hear the sound of the unspoken, not only among the captives but also among the victors. She has consistently addressed that relation to authority which brands American traditions: "ambulant vagrant bastardy comes looming through assurance and sanctification." In the early poems style often registers aftershock, sometimes across a span of pages, sometimes in bits. "Dragooned / I dined with destroyers," or, "knocking her O / hero // in the castle, doors opened like beggars." These books reorchestrate prose from Holmes's Civil War diary and letters, and Edward Gibbon; the Old and New Testaments rustle through them, and narratives of captivity, but the touches are fresh: "At Cape Difficulty / science swims in miracles." "Warriors wait / hidden in the fierce hearts of children." "With a snowshoe for shovel / I opened the clock // and we searched for peace in its deep and private present. // Outside, the world swarmed with sorcerers." She ends the prefatory essay, "Close by [the family story] lies a great forest approaching Modernism my early poems project aggression." But that projection remains useful.

Gaps in Howe's poetry are routine, continuous, productive. Typical poems run from nine to thirteen or twenty-three to twenty-seven short lines, through brief clauses and suspended phrases, laddering theme while suspending closure all along the chain. Often, spaces widen between lines to enforce the same effect. Some poems shift into word grids, that is, five or so words to a line broadly spaced, the lines again spaced widely, as if imitating a Chinese lyric set out in literal translation. The result is meant to be walked around in and bounced upon. "The Liberties" includes a Noh-like spirit play about Swift's Stella and Lear's Cordelia in which these word grids also enter. While all these stylistic decisions aim at preserving suggestion while drawing intelligence into its service, the risk is that her texture can seem as veiled and indulgent as it can seem rigorous. Nonetheless, her gaps are not melodramas of deferred meaning, but pryings-open of predication. I see them as her way of deriving from statement, simultaneously, the ranges of both history and *sous histoire*.

Published well after these four books, *Defenestration of Prague* supplies justification for this attitude and practice. "For we are language Lost / in language," and then, "near and far a fugue of fear / crisp aphorisms die out." Section 12 of this book argues that history can be heard through Sabine ears, that is, behind the name-clatter of a triumphal record: "Nomenclator / anointed Latin memory of plunder // mass migration of women // hid knowledge." Howe's stutter is meant to foster hearing. And the early books under review here do that with both event and "vocables / of shape or sound," for example through a remarkable collage from

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Holme's Civil War letters to his parents, in *Secret History of the Dividing Line.* The form of feeling in her collage from Holmes is actually post-Hiroshima; its *sous histoire* becomes our own history while the earlier war closes off any nostalgic retreat—and all of this one hears coming between the lines.

One can infer from Howe's work a traumatic submersion by history that calls forth a myth of audition. Americans typically deny the weight of history, and therefore pretend that they are still above water. To them Howe's myth of audition may seem a fairy tale. But the American wave compounds the submersion: the Puritan model of reinvented authority, moralistic practicality projected fiercely against the night, and innovation, has mounted the global epic of modernization. So its violences, Howe's subject, are no antiquarian's hobby. They are more like volatile octanes, so that Howe's dry archival materials turn out to be fuses. A decade ago in *My Emily Dickinson*, Howe traced her exemplar's moves "backward through history into aboriginal anagogy" to a "new grammar grounded in humility and hesitation. . . . What voice when we hesitate and are silent is moving to meet us?" That is not Gertrude Stein's sort of question. It shapes Howe's books into witching wands. Where have the bridges really gone down, and the trails grown over? Who is that waving on the other side? Howe is convinced that in words lurks an instrument, or an instrument lost in an instrument, that might serve.

**JOHN PECK**

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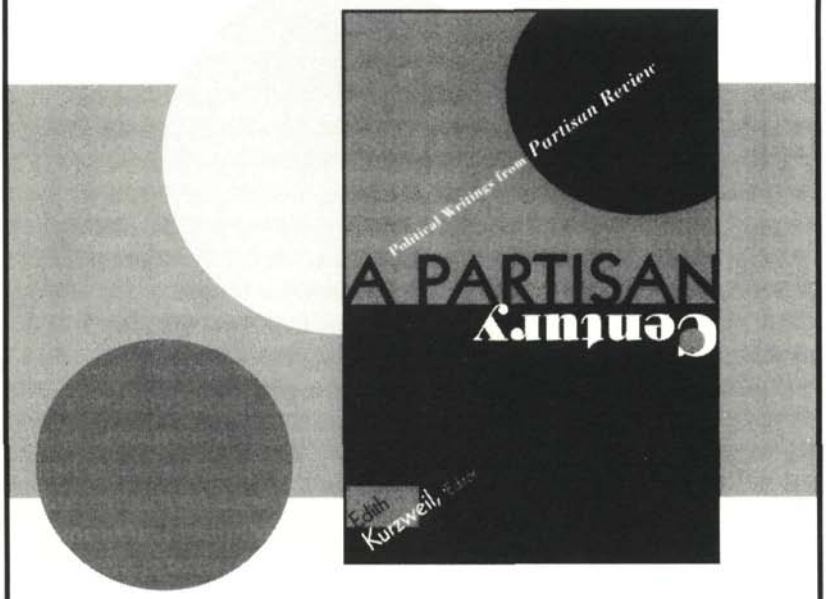


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